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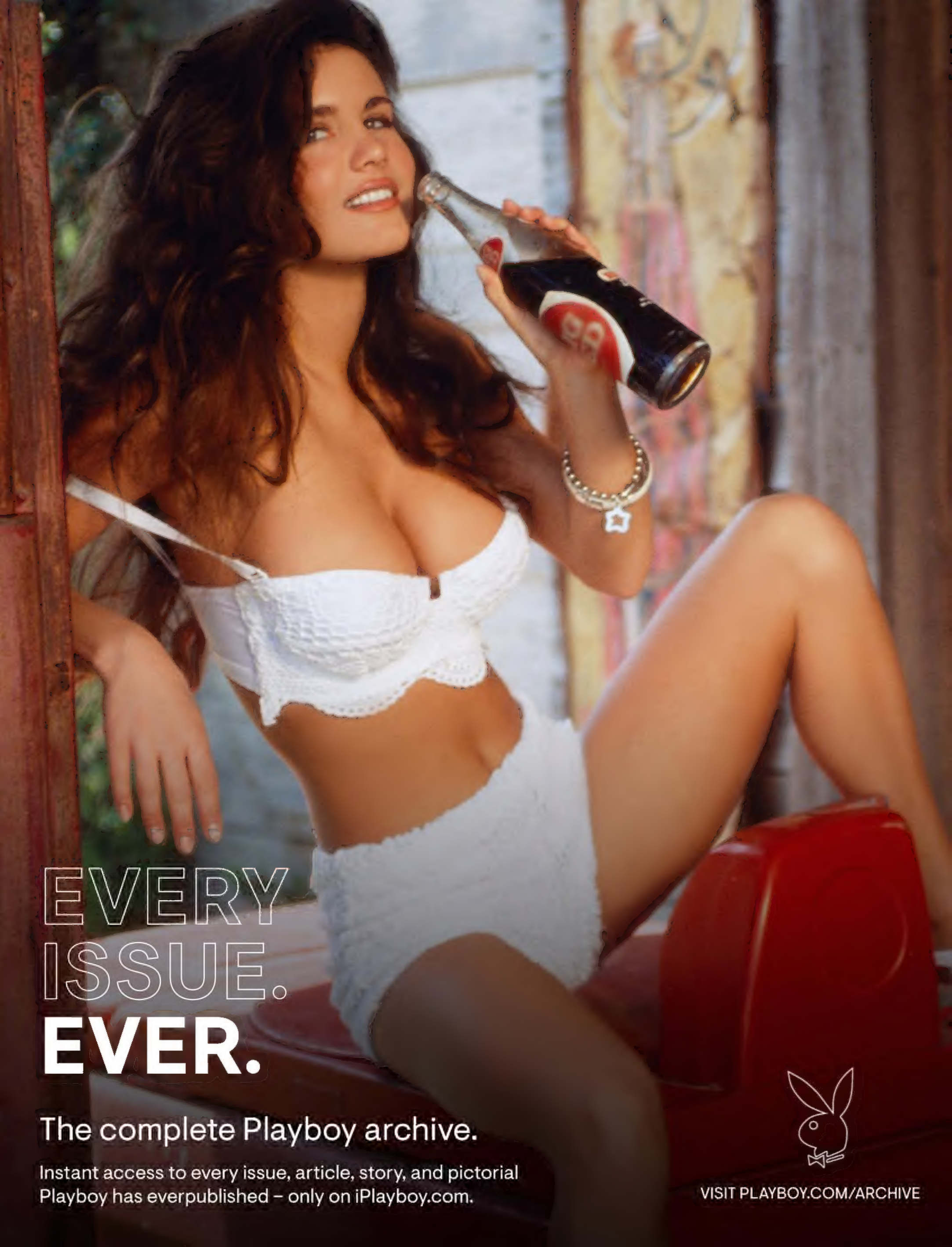
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Illustrations **Toon53 Productions**

Motoring Editor **John Page**

Senior Photo Editor **Luba V Nel**

ADVERTISING SALES **pieter@dhsmedia.co.za**

for more information

PHONE: +27 10 006 0051
MAIL: PO Box 71450, Bryanston, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2021
ADDRESS: First Floor Block 6 Fourways Office Park, Cnr Roos Street & Fourways Boulevard, 2191
EMAIL: info@dhsmedia.co.za
WEB: www.playboymagaustralia.com
FACEBOOK: facebook.com/Playboy-Australia
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MARZIA DORLANDO
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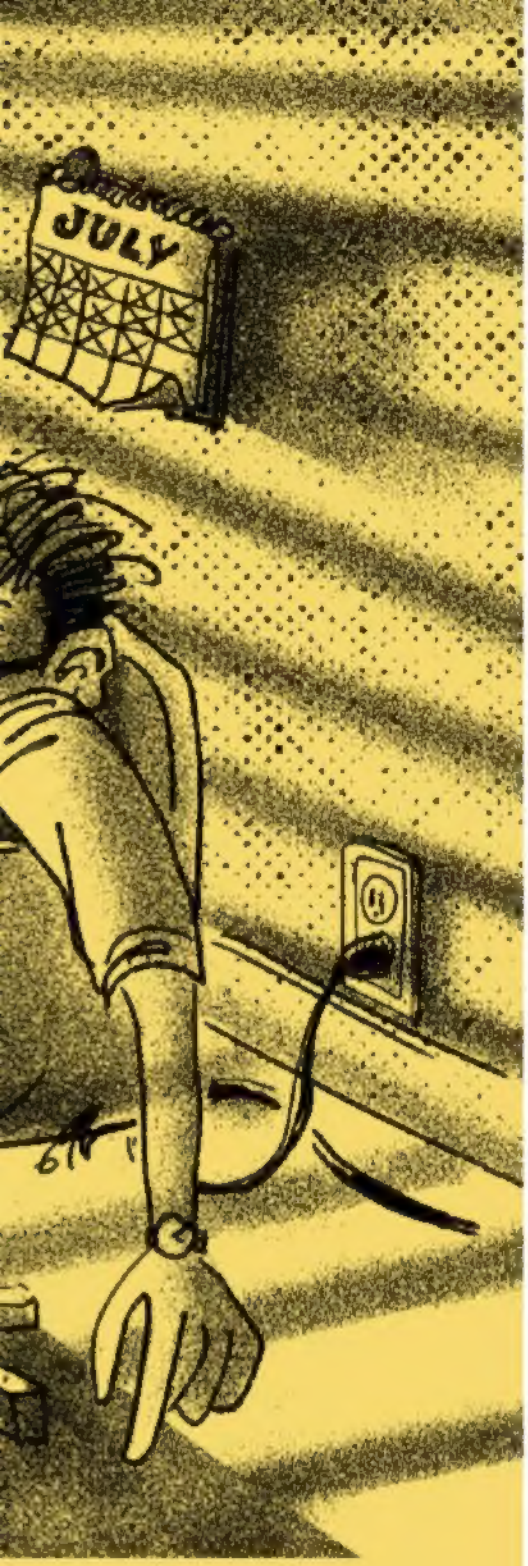
WEED WARRIOR: GOOD TRAINING FOR A PANDEMIC

Self-isolation? Coping with anxiety? Turns out that surviving the lockdown has some parallels with navigating illicit drug sales

BY **ANDREW DEANGELO** ILLUSTRATION BY **ROB STITES**



In the middle of the dusty Arizona desert somewhere near Mexico, I was stuck in a dank motel room. It was the mid-1990s, and I was waiting on a large load of weed from across the border. My job was to inspect the cannabis, provide the down payment upon approval and organize the logistics with the drivers for transportation. My constant companion in this underground enterprise: about $75,000, stashed in a black Samsonite hard-case rollie with a built-in lock. It was enough money for the down payment but not so much that I wanted to pay a courier to babysit it. My Mexican contacts told me the delivery was imminent and that I would be in and out quickly. I believed them. I needed the weed.

It was the time of year in Tucson when college students were going back to school. All the hotels were booked, and I was forced to stay out in the border towns where I had to inspect the load. This convergence of events made me feel uneasy. I couldn't leave my room. I was afraid of being seen. I was short on supplies. It felt like something very bad could be lurking just around the corner, and all I could do was wait.

And wait.

And wait.

In those days it could take a long time for product to be safely delivered. In this case, it took about five weeks. What I had no way of knowing at that time was just how many pandemic survival skills I would learn over the course of that tense motel stay.

I was young, and it was before the internet, before cell phones. I left the relative safety of the motel only rarely, and only for the most essential supplies. There was one fast food restaurant and one gas station/convenience store in the entire town. A few times I drove to another town to load up on food, drink and softcore porno magazines. I needed some entertainment, and the motel had no cable television. It did have a pay phone, which I used on the regular. Other than that it was just me, the cash, a couple books, a pad of paper, a pen, an ounce of weed and a jar of Vaseline.

It was just me, the cash, a couple books, a pad of paper, a pen, an ounce of weed and a jar of Vaseline.

That was it. For weeks, I had to sit there and babysit a pile of cash and do my best to avoid everyone.

I had to learn to manage a certain amount of stress as I was engaged in criminal activity. Meditation became an essential tool of the trade, as did push-ups and sit-ups. Copious cannabis consumption was a constant, followed by a mix of soothing euphoria and utter paranoia. Whenever I ventured out, I felt a deep sense of fear. Every person seemed like an undercover cop or a federal agent—my mind raced to think of every contingency, every possible outcome and every escape route.

In the situation I had placed myself in, I had planned redundancies to infinity and beyond. Most of these were just in my head. The truth was that I was stuck and vulnerable. I had to live with very little over an extended period of time in the same location. I was in unfamiliar surroundings. It was hot. There was no air conditioning. I ate the food that was available. And I tried not to drive myself insane. I spent my time managing my paranoia and fear, reading and writing, watching network television, and wondering why the hell I was in the weed business in the first place. *There must be something else I can do to make a living.*

As it turns out, there wasn't. I still sell weed for a living. But I get to do it legally now, which is a big relief.

If I survive the coronavirus pandemic, I will look back at cannabis prohibition as something I could control and even trust. It may not have been a picnic, but you can predict cops' behavior much easier than you can predict the behavior of a virus.

Nevertheless, as I sit here in self-quarantine, I am grateful for the survival skills I learned while stranded in the desert for five weeks waiting on a load of weed. I never thought they would come in handy, but I can sit here for a long time without losing my shit, and right now that matters. I have no regrets.

If I survive the coronavirus pandemic, I will look back at cannabis prohibition as something I could control and even trust.

UP *in* SMOKE

Playing a stoner sent these actors' careers sky-high

BY **STEPHEN REBELLO**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ORION/KOBAL/SHUTTERSTOCK**

Join us as we revisit some of the most memorable movie stints from influential actors pretending to be under the influence.

Jack Nicholson in *Easy Rider:* a boozy ACLU lawyer and perpetual screwup who hits the road with motorcycling hippie freaks Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper. Drugs of choice: Jim Beam and, later, grass, which was actually toked on camera. *Why the buzz:* Nicholson gave a career-making performance in this 1969 counterculture smash. *Downer:* He didn't win the best supporting actor Oscar that year.

Peter Fonda and Jack Nicholson on the roll in *Easy Rider*. (Columbia/Kobal/Shutterstock)

Sean Penn in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High:* high school surfer dude and moron supreme Jeff Spicoli. Drugs of choice: buds, ludes. *Why the buzz:* Whether facing off with uptight history teacher Mr. Hand or nonchalantly ordering pizza during class, Penn makes Spicoli an icon by hitting every situation and line way out of the park. *Downer:* We'll pay good money to anyone who can find Penn's sense of humor today.

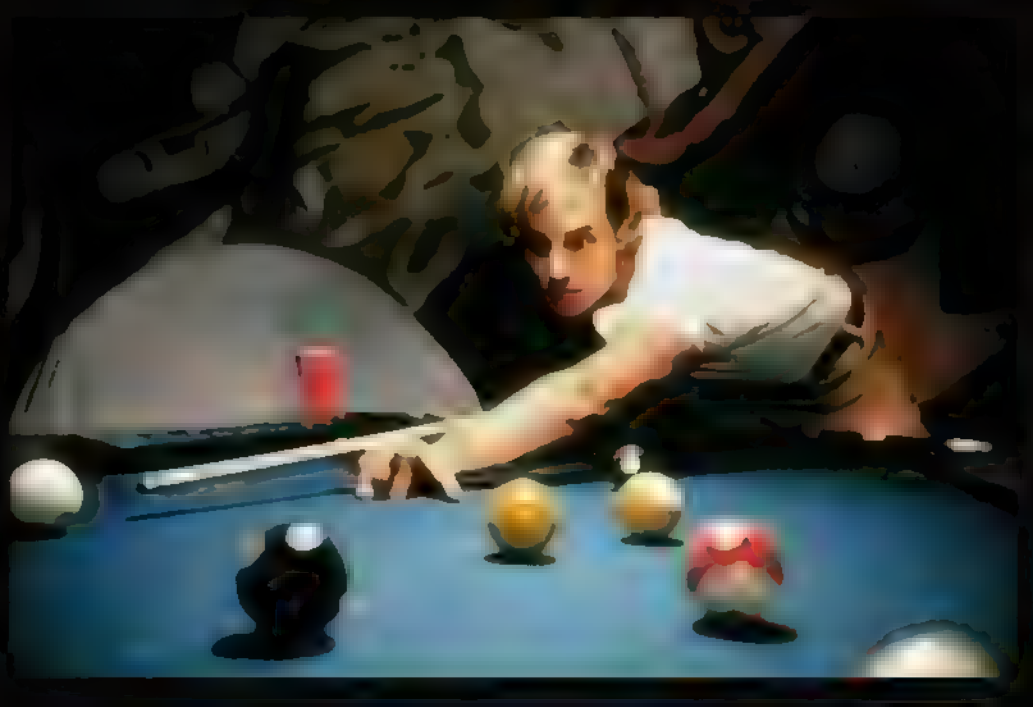
Sean Penn (center) plays stoner Jeff Spicoli—he puts the *high* in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. (Universal/Kobal/Shutterstock)

George Carlin, Alex Winter and Keanu Reeves in the first *Bill and Ted's* film. (Orion/Kobal/Shutterstock)

Keanu Reeves in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure:* the likably lunkheaded high school senior and heavy-metal band member who time-trips through ancient history along with his best bud to ace an exam. *Drug of choice:* Ted's most excellent obliviousness. *Why the buzz:* Reeves has never been funnier, especially when displaying his iffy grasp of history. *Downer:* A sequel and animated TV version ran this franchise into the ground.

Dave Chappelle in *Half-Baked:* hilarious double duty as Thurgood Jensen, a janitor at a drug lab, and pothead rapper and pimp daddy Sir Smoke-a-Lot. *Drug of choice:* Weed. Duh. Why the buzz: Whether trying to con his squeaky-clean girlfriend Mary Jane (get it?) or confessing that pot has made him impotent, Chappelle is hilarious. *Downer:* Where's Dave now when we need him?

The character played by Dave Chapelle (center) is fully relatable in *Half-Baked*. (Michael Gibson/Universal/Kobal/Shutterstock)



Matthew McConaughey in *Dazed and Confused:* a swaggering, muscle-car-driving sex machine too cool (and too old) for the high school crowd he hangs with. *Drugs of choice:* grass, beer. *Why the buzz:* McConaughey supplies so many of the yuks and so much of the pathos in this soulfully hilarious classic that it's no wonder the performance made his career. *Downer:* McConaughey hasn't scored this great a role since.

All right, all right, all right: Matthew McConaughey in *Dazed and Confused*. (Universal/Gramercy/Kobal/Shutterstock)

Mike Myers in *Wayne's World:* the headbanging nimrod who broadcasts his own public-access TV show from his parents' basement with loser friend Garth (Dana Carvey). *Drug of choice:* Unspecified, but it's all in the subtext. *Why the buzz:* Myers and Carvey parlayed their Saturday Night Live chemistry into big-screen success, becoming 1990s grunge icons. *Downer:* The lame Wayne's World 2 is not worthy.

Party on, excellent! Mike Myers and Dana Carvey in *Wayne's World*. (Paramount/Kobal/Shutterstock)

Deepra MELA

Such an honour to have a gorgeous and talented beauty feature! We're curious to know how your journey has been as one of the most respected models in your industry. Hello, thank you very much. It is an honor for me to be featured in South Africa..My journey has been crazy ... I started as a dancer in a school in Brazil. I ended up becoming a dental assistant, on a beach I was invited to a photo shoot, ON THE SITE. I did that and it was the beginning of my bikini modeling period in South America. After a few years I started traveling and did several countries and ended up in Las Vegas. I'm still doing photo shoots, but I also run my own company.

Given your obvious stunning good looks and striking features, tell us a bit about where you're from? Already gave that away, hahaha. Born and Raised in Brazil. An original Brazilian Lady(uhm most of the time).. Come from a small City in the North East of Brazil, Açailândia-Maranhão

Tell us something surprising about you? You probably will not believe this, and also your readers won't. But in normal life I am a shy person..

When no one is watching I... I do crazy stuff and video myself for my instagram and then i don't post it...simply too crazy

What are some of the things you like to do, behind the cameras and all the glitz and glamour? Love to go on beautiful hiking trips, not for days but nice 4-5 km trails, i love archery, yes i can shoot an arrow between your eyes from 30 meters. ;-) i might be off a few cm..

If we were to try and sweep you right off your feet, what are some of the things you look for in an ideal partner? The needle in the haystack, HONESTY, hahaha. Yes that is hard to find... you just can't sweep me off my feet on a first date, time is what sweeps me off my feet, time that will show the real person....

..And what would make you go running in the opposite direction as fast as possible? Arrogance, jerky behavior, disrespectful towards me or anyone else oooohhhh and dirty teeth of course...

You're a seemingly talented lady, what are some, if any, of your hidden talents not many people know about? Most people see a Brazilian woman with nice looks and think, must be just looks... This lady is a jack of all trades, and i am a pretty good business woman...i am appreciated for interior designing.. I am a pretty good cook if I am in the mood...And I am an official Chocolate maker, bean to bar..

What makes you feel sexy? Lingerie and getting ready for a night out. I love to dress up, wear heels and sexy clothing, be a sensual woman... that makes me feel sexy...

If you could have any superpower in the world, what would it be and why? I would love to have the power to heal people and to destroy poverty, I don't think that any one should be in poverty and some others have 5 Ferrari's.

What can we expect from you this year? Any major plans and exciting things we can look forward to from you? I got a few invites to do some small films, but not sure what that will be and if it is really big. I am working on a high quality Chocolate brand, which will be real couverture chocolate... Starting it in the USA. If anyone here wants to run the Brand, reach out...AZTECS COUVERTURE is coming...lol....

It has been a true pleasure getting to know you! Any final words for our readers out there? Honesty lasts longer than lies, stay true to yourself....Stay grounded and positive..

Thank you all for reading about me... see you on my Instagram...;-)

The TRUMP Propaganda Translator:

Decoding McEnany

Our White House correspondent puts into plain English what the administration's press secretary is really saying—and not saying

BY BRIAN KAREM

If there's one thing both sides of the political spectrum can agree on about Donald Trump, it is that his administration seems to be in constant motion.

Some say it's chaos. Some say it's inspired brilliance. But whatever you label the media vortex, until recently it did not include daily briefings by the White House press secretary.

Trump's previous press secretary, Stephanie Grisham, did not hold a single press briefing, although her predecessors, Sarah Huckabee Sanders and Sean Spicer, often did (with much spin). Those close to the president say he finally got to a point where he liked being his own press secretary and thought he could do it better than anyone else.

Enter press secretary Kayleigh McEnany, who stepped up to the plate and reintroduced the daily briefing. On five occasions she and the president have even briefed on the same day quite a difference from Trump's other press secretaries. Both Spicer and Sanders said they wouldn't brief on the same day the president spoke because they didn't want to step on his message.

With McEnany it has been different. Insiders say the president is more than willing to share the spotlight with her because she is so adept at backing him without stepping on his message. Others think Trump just enjoys having someone agree with him, since so many these days do not.

To some, McEnany is smooth and professional, the best the country has seen under the Trump administration. Her appearance coincided with the disappearance of Kellyanne Conway and others who used to hold gaggles in the Brady Briefing Room and out on Pebble Beach. But those other mouthpieces have famously bungled. So far McEnany has avoided being arrogantly combative. She smiles and pushes back against the press. She scolds. But she neither sneers nor claims the "alternative facts" narrative that destroyed Conway's credibility.

The truth is, McEnany is about the same as Spicer and Sanders, though she does carry a briefing book so she can remain constant with her spin.

Her press briefings break down to an opening statement of five to 10 minutes, followed by 10 minutes of questions. No more than 14 reporters can be seated, thanks to the pandemic, versus the 75 to 100 who routinely pounced on both Spicer and Sanders. McEnany appears lucid and in control. At the end she often calls on the 15th reporter, who is from OANN and isn't technically allowed into the room but sits behind a line marked "for guests." McEnany then issues a closing statement, often disparaging the very reporters who've just asked her a question. Then she'll drop the mike and leave. Her briefings routinely last 25 to 30 minutes. She doesn't linger.

McEnany obviously learned from Spicer and Sanders, who often got into trouble the longer their briefings lasted. Obama's last spokesman, Josh Earnest, held briefings for up to 90 minutes, leaving reporters to wonder when he would tire of his marathons. At least in his case, as with Spicer and Sanders, real information was exchanged on occasion.

McEnany's press briefings are nothing more than theater. The reporters are props. The event is nothing more than a mini-campaign rally—or the administration's equivalent of a high school pep rally. Little news is made. Few facts are given. Most of the major networks, including, occasionally, Fox News, have stopped broadcasting these disasters live.

The reporters who cover the briefings as part of their job are often left with glazed eyes and dyspepsia. Some of the audio and video technicians who've been covering presidential administrations since Reagan are left shaking their heads.

More than once I've heard a variation of, "You need an interpreter to understand what the hell she's saying." So as a public service, I am doing what I once did with Sanders: providing handy translations of her favorite briefing-room expressions, all in the interest of better understanding.

When Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany says, "Can't get ahead of the president on that," she means: "We literally don't know what the hell the president is going to say, and, further, whatever we say, he's likely to later contradict us, so we aren't saying shit." An early favorite from the Sean Spicer days.

"The Democrats are fundamentally unserious." The Democrats have proposed something the president doesn't like.

"I'll get back to you on that." She will never get back to you on that.

"Mail-in voting will lead to fraud…" …unless it's in Florida; then it's okay because the president lives there.

"It was extensive, good reporting…" The reporting favors the president

"There is ample evidence of [fill in the blank]." There is absolutely no evidence, but the president wishes there were.

"We're tracking it closely." They have no idea what's going on and this is probably the first time they've heard about it.

McEnany's press briefings are nothing more than theater.

"The mainstream media has failed to report on..." The president saw something he likes in the news and wants to see more of it.

"I won't engage in hypotheticals." When followed by "but," this means she will engage in hypotheticals—but only if she can spin it to support the president. Otherwise she doesn't want to answer the question.

"No one has worked harder than this president on [fill in the blank]." The president has done little or nothing but wants to get credit for mentioning the issue in a way that makes him look good to his base.

"Many people are saying..." No one is saying it. A favorite of the president and his press office when they want people to think someone other than the president is saying something.

"Polls show the president has a 96 percent approval rating among the GOP." A favorite, even of the president himself. The joke is everyone in the West Wing was polled, and Trump still couldn't hit 100 percent approval among his staff. The truth is there have been no official polls that back this claim.

"The president is ready to act on this..." Not unless it's done by praising him first. Then someone will have to tell him what action to take.

"The president moves at a very rapid pace..." ...when he has the television remote in his hand. This statement is often used to defend a lack of action by the administration on an issue.

"No one has done more to protect the American people from [fill in the blank]." Whether it's Russia, China, North Korea, violence, the failing economy or something else, this is a tip-off that the president has done very little. Take, for example, the coronavirus: The president has failed at everything he's done, first calling it a hoax, then saying it would be gone by Easter, claiming that testing causes more cases and saying ingesting or injecting disinfectants will cure people.

"The president is hard at work..." ...when he's not on the back nine at his favorite golf club. He has spent more than 250 days of his administration golfing. The Marine guard, usually stationed at the West Wing door to indicate the president is in, rarely appears these days.

"I certainly will inquire about that and follow up with you and find out what the status is." You will never hear from her, and she hopes you'll eventually forget about it so she won't have to answer. This is an alternative to "I'll get back to you" but is meant to address weightier issues the president and the administration wish to ignore—like the Russian bounty story

"I would refer to our experts." "We acknowledge the question needs an answer, but we know we'll screw it up and can't hide from the question forever, so ask someone else so we don't have to come back and tell another lie to cover the first one."

"The tweet speaks for itself." Another oldie but goodie, a remnant from the Spicer era, that means there's no way to answer your question about the tweet without seeming like a racist, idiot or misogynist or, more important, without making the speaker criminally liable. So, moving on....

"I haven't spoken to the president about that specific fact scenario..." Here the press secretary hopes you won't notice that she has no idea what the issue is, what to say about it or how to spin it, so she's spitting out nonsense to hopefully confuse you so she can move on.

There are of course many, many more misleading and empty phrases. The president and his staff have told thousands of lies since Day One, when Sean Spicer walked into the briefing room and told us Trump's inauguration set attendance records.

Edging

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
KATIE BAILIE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

edging (*v*) the act of delaying an orgasm for as long as possible for the ultimate benefit of a more intense climax

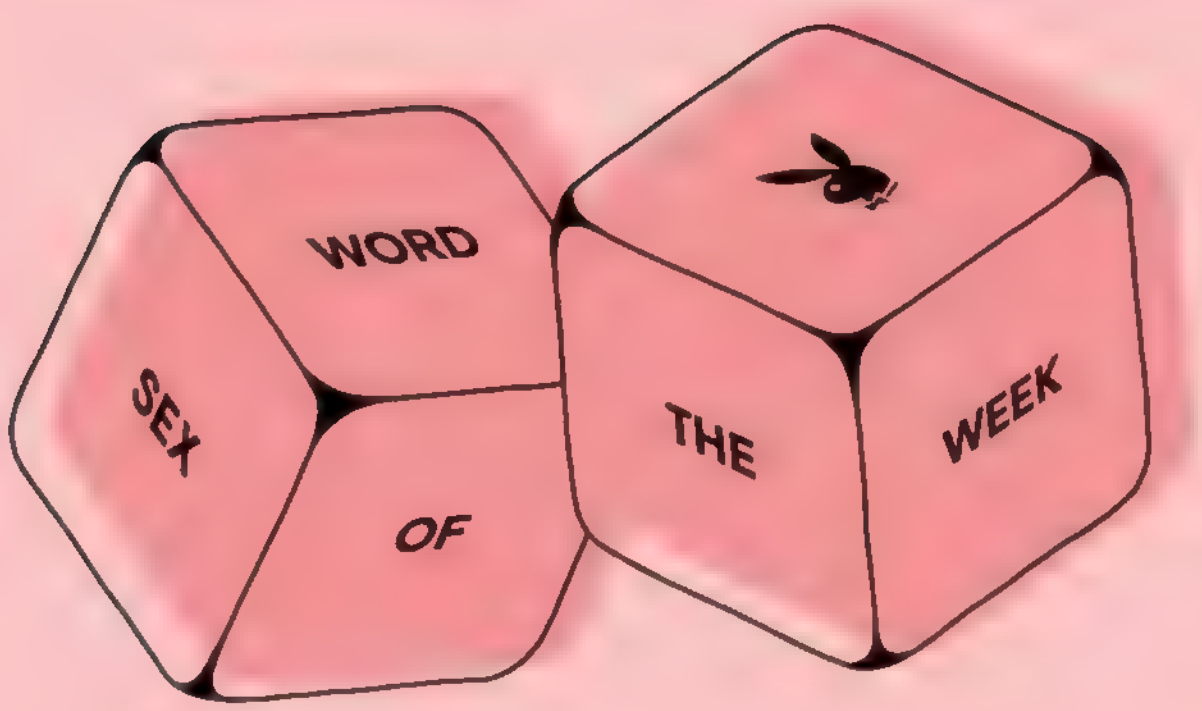
Jeremy edged himself to the brink, pulling himself back each time. When he finally let go, the release was more powerful than anything he had felt before.

Everyone knows what mind control is. So imagine that, but for your junk. Edging takes a remarkable amount of concentration and discipline, but the payoff can literally knock you off your feet. To edge is to deliberately delay sexual gratification to create a more intense climax later on. So essentially masturbating or having sex to the tipping point of orgasm, and then taking your foot off the gas. To the unenlightened person this may sound incredibly frustrating, but to the sexual connoisseur it's the gift that keeps on giving.

To become a master of edging, starting out with a start-stop technique is pretty straightforward. Pleasure yourself until you get excited and then hit pause for a few seconds or a few minutes. Once you're back to a relaxed state, do it again and keep doing it. Each time you start and stop, you're increasing the tension level in your pelvic floor tension that will be released in a powerful way once you allow yourself to go over the orgasm cliff.

Not only is edging great for increasing pleasure for all genders, it can help men who struggle with premature ejaculation. By diligently practicing edging on your own and then with a partner, you'll have better control of those muscles and be able to delay orgasm for longer.

Delayed gratification could be the key to leveling up your intimate life. So go slowly and smell the roses.



Pompoir

WR TTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

LLUSTRAT ONS BY
KATIE BAILIE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

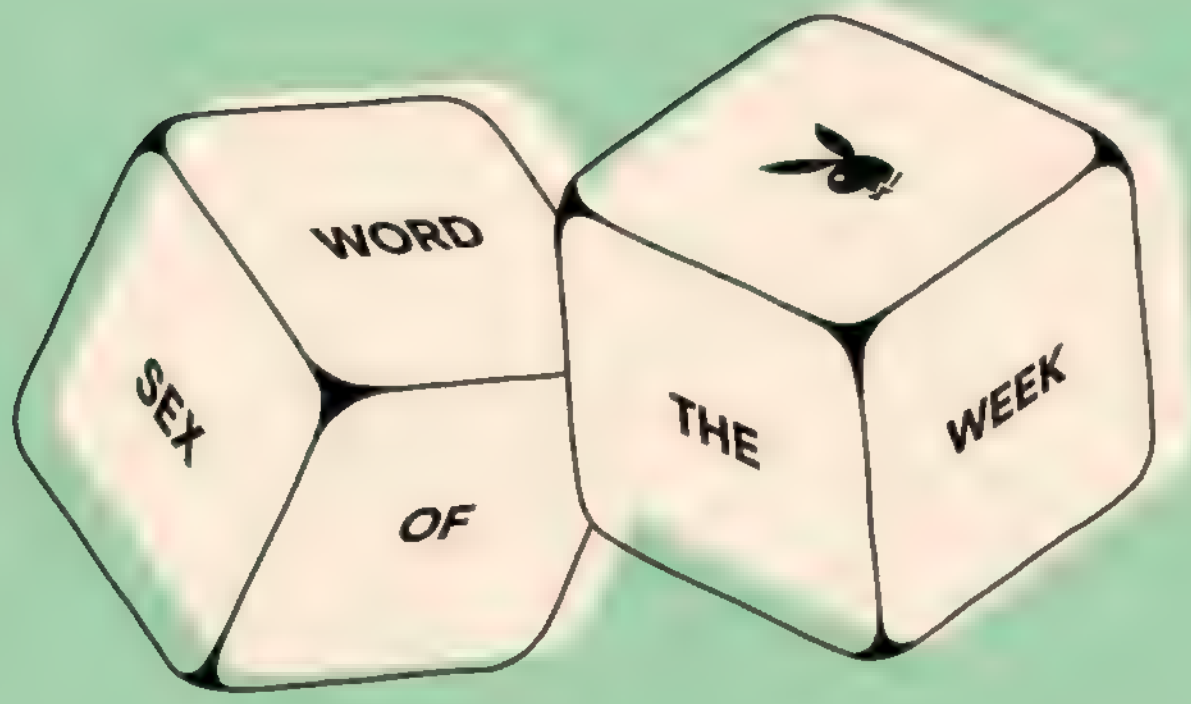
pompoir (*n*) contracting and releasing the vaginal muscles in order to stimulate the penis during penetrative sex

Gemma mounted her partner and performed pompoir on his erect penis until they both climaxed.

This week's word is great for your orgasm if you're a vagina-haver, but it can also strengthen your pelvic walls, leading to better bladder health! It's called pompoir, and some basically consider it a fancy word for doing Kegels on a dick.

During traditional penetrative sex, two partners will move rhythmically in tandem with each other, thrusting or rocking. In pompoir, however, both parties are completely stationary and the only part in motion is the vagina-haver's vaginal canal. The pelvic floor muscles—specifically the pubococcygeus muscles—do all the heavy lifting. They squeeze and release, and—if the practitioner is highly skilled—they also tug at the penis, push it down or even gently twist on the shaft. To a casual outside observer, it will look like a woman is just calmly sitting cowgirl-style on her partner's penis, until, of course, the tension builds to the point where one (or, ideally, both) of them orgasms. It takes a lot of patience, concentration and restraint, but the payoff can be a mind-blowing climax.

Doing pompoir exercises on your own, outside the context of sex, can also do wonders for your pelvic floor health. Over time, the pelvic floor can weaken due to childbirth, menopause or other age-related factors. Practicing pompoir can help regain power in those muscles, leading to health benefits like a stronger bladder. Whatever your reason for wanting to become a pompoir master, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that each practice session gets you closer to being in complete control of your (and your partner's) orgasm.



Unicorn

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
KATIE BAILIE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

unicorn (*n*) a person, usually a young bisexual woman, who sexually interacts with a committed heterosexual couple

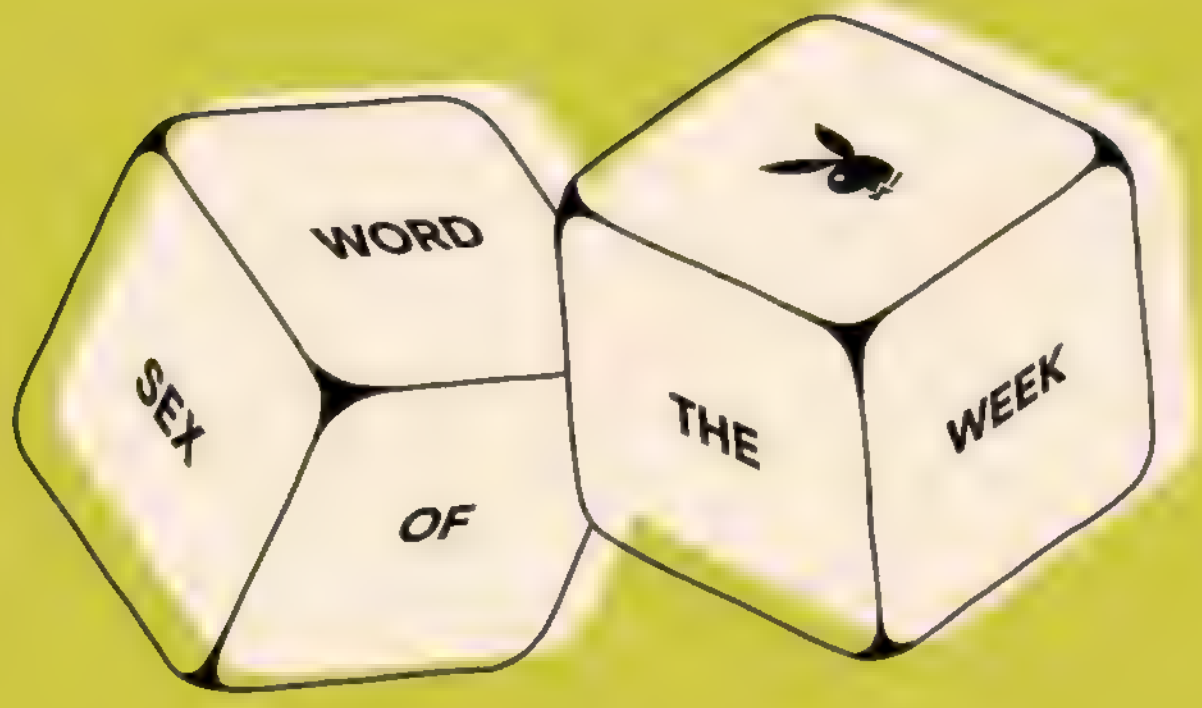
After searching for a third for almost a year, Zach and Abby finally met a perfect unicorn that they wished to welcome into their bedroom lives.

It's time for a quick lesson on the magical creatures that are unicorns. And no, we're not talking about the ones in your favorite young adult novels. In the vast world of polyamory, a unicorn is a term used to refer to p"the third" in a three-way relationship, specifically a woman who is added to the dynamic of a married couple. The woman is usually bisexual, while the couple consists of a heterosexual man and a bisexual woman. She becomes the secondary partner of both the man and woman, with the bond between the couple remaining the primary relationship.

The unicorn isn't expected to develop serious feelings or heartfelt attachments to the committed couple; her only goal is to experience pleasure. It's increasingly a way for young women to sexually explore and achieve sexual agency without the constraints of monogamy. As you might guess, the term is used to imply that such a find is rare in the dating landscape.

"Unicorn hunting" describes the search for such an individual and is a controversial term in the poly community. A common criticism of unicorn-hunting couples is that they often end up treating the woman as a toy in their relationship, an object to act out explicit fantasies upon and then discard when it becomes inconvenient. It can also be seen as straight male wish-fulfillment, in which the male partner is the driving force behind finding a unicorn and the main beneficiary.

However you choose to see unicorns or the couples who seek them out, compassion and respect from all parties inform a major part of successful unicorn scenarios. Unicorns have their own feelings, personal lives and schedules, and couples looking to explore a third would do well to remember this.



WAP

ANITA LITTLE
KATIE BAILIE

If your libidinous mind can imagine it, there's probably already a term for it

Escorts Need Love Too

The Story Behind Our Story

How do escorts find love? We spoke with a writer who spent more than a year answering that question

WRITTEN BY
HELEN SIBILA

Being single can suck, but finding someone worth dating isn't easy either. Now imagine what it's like for "providers"—sex workers who are paid for their companionship and physical intimacy—who want to find that someone special. Do you tell a potential boyfriend that you sleep with others for a living? If so, how do you tell them? And when? And how do you find them in the first place? Those added layers of difficulty are the focus of journalist Tim Struby's new Playboy feature article, "How Does an Escort Find a Boyfriend? Hint: It's Not Easy."

Struby, a New York City based writer whose work has appeared in The New Yorker, ESPN the Magazine and New York, to name just a few, is no stranger to subcultures. His reporting and research often span multiple years—"I've done stories that take a month to a year to four years," he says—in which he immerses himself in various underground communities, including South Africa's illegal street racing scene and the East Coast's mafia-connected boxing crowd.

For this particular feature, Struby spent more than a year conducting in-depth interviews with high-end escorts about their attempts at starting and sustaining long-term romantic relationships while pursuing an often stigmatized career. We wanted to know more, so we spoke to Struby about what it was like to get to know these women, what the process taught him and whether dating can ever be a walk in the proverbial park.

PLAYBOY: I'm curious about how you came up with the concept for your article.

TIM STRUBY: About five years ago a friend of mine, photographer Lynsey Addario, reached out about a multimedia project she was working on for an organization called Project&. They wanted to honor the 40-year anniversary of Working, a book by Studs Terkel about the everyday lives of working people, by talking to people from all walks of life and putting together interviews and photos of them. I had a friend who was connected with an escort, and I thought that would be an interesting perspective to include, so I had her introduce me.

When I interviewed this woman she mentioned that she had a long-term boyfriend, and later another escort told me she was married I had never thought that was possible or even considered that reality before. How do escorts

"Can you share your partner? Are you comfortable with that? You don't know until you actually experience it."

have a boyfriend or a husband? That comment stuck with me for a long time.

PLAYBOY: How did you go from thinking about that comment to writing a nearly 5,000-word feature?

STRUBY: When I look for stories, I look for something that confounds me or makes me curious. Two years later, I decided to call up one of those escorts and see if she would be interested in talking with me, in depth, about her love life. She said she would be on board I ended up going on Twitter and finding other escorts in the New York area to interview. I reached out to about 40 different escorts, ranging from 23 to 47 years old, and heard back from maybe 10 of them.

I met up with them and explained that my article would focus specifically on their personal life and that the process would go on for at least a year—so that it would be nuanced and truthful, not sensationalized. It was a subject that a lot of them wanted to talk about but never had a venue to talk about it.

I ended up with three main subjects who were in different stages of dating—one had a long-term boyfriend, one was dating more casually and the other was just starting to navigate dates.

PLAYBOY: Did you get the sense that providing a new outlet outside their friends, therapists and fellow escorts was beneficial for them?

STRUBY: Without question. It was validating for them in a sense. Therapy is one thing, but to be in the public eye and to put this out there is another. It freed them in a way, I think.

For other sex workers who are basically celebrities, the job has its difficulties, but at least they can be open about who they are. The women I interviewed live this double life; they're proud of what they do, but they can't showcase what they do. I think that's really hard on them.

PLAYBOY: You ended up working on this project for a year and a half. I imagine many stories you heard didn't make it into the article. Did you talk to male providers or other types of sex workers like porn stars or cam girls?

STRUBY: I didn't cover the entire scope of sex workers, because there is just such a wide range of work to cover. It would have become a book at that point.

When this story started, I had reached out to providers from different backgrounds, including race. There were a lot of similarities in experiences for the women, but I did notice in talking to Bre, a black provider, that she had a different take as a woman of color. I wish we had more room in the piece to talk about that aspect of her experience, but we decided to focus on their experiences dating rather than their actual work.

There aren't as many male providers as there are female providers, but I talked to one very popular provider early on in the process and I quickly realized that male escorts don't face the same stigmas or stereotypes as female escorts. His interview was just so banal. When I talked to these women, I could tell they deal with a different beast when it comes to their dating life. It is quite possible that the men weren't being as forthcoming with me, but overall it just seemed like their ego was built up from their work. All the women I talked to were proud of their work, but they also dealt with insecurities and issues and they were very open about talking about them. So I decided to focus on just women escorts, because I wanted to give them the most voice and the most human story.

PLAYBOY: I was surprised at how some of the women's partners were accepting of their work at first, but their relationships didn't work out in the end.

STRUBY: I was surprised by the same thing. You think, "Oh, you don't want someone fucking your girlfriend. Fair enough." But often it was less about them having sex with other people and more about time and money. That's where it gets complicated. These women make so much money, and that can be demeaning for some men. And they sometimes have to be gone for a weekend or week at a time, and they can't communicate with their partner while they're working.

PLAYBOY: Did you have any preconceived ideas about this industry?

STRUBY: I came in with the idea that these women do it for a good time, but I honestly don't think it's all that different from being a banker or a lawyer. Their interior lives are very normal; I think a lot of readers will be surprised by that. I watched The Girlfriend Experience on Starz, and I felt disconnected from that cold aesthetic Steven Soderbergh created. It was missing all the humor that comes with this work. All the providers I've ever met and interviewed are so funny, smart and likable.

I have always had a soft spot for strippers and escorts because I find that they are usually more self-aware than most people. I like people who are comfortable with themselves regardless of how the mainstream views them. As a writer, I've talked to a lot of people, and I can honestly say I have never met more fully formed and more in-tune people than the women I talked to for this story. They came to terms with their own contradictions without hesitation. All the women I spoke to are super feminist, but they also see the contradictions in their double life. I learned an immense amount from them.

PLAYBOY: Has your own love life benefitted from this experience?

STRUBY: I don't know if I have. Do I have a new perception about sex work? Yes. This has definitely helped me understand dating more than any dating app I've ever been on. But does it help with my single dating life? Not really.

PLAYBOY: Would you date an escort?

STRUBY: I don't think I could. I just think it would be very difficult. How would you feel if you went on a date with someone, and on the second date they said they were an escort? Sometimes the providers would ask me that question, and I couldn't really say yes or no. It's one of those things you just do not know until you're there. Can you share your partner? Are you comfortable with that? You don't know until you actually experience it.

PLAYBOY: Our Playboy Plus stars, many of whom are adult actors, always tell me the funniest stories. What were some that you heard from the women you talked to?

STRUBY: One escort had an older client, around 80 years old, who didn't want to have sex. All he wanted her to do was to come to his apartment with a fake gun and pretend to shoot him. He would use fake blood and then just jerk off to it.

The beauty of what they do is that it can be as weird and funny as that, but it can also be as mundane as a nine-to-five job. Like right now for your job, you have to sit with me for an hour and listen to me ramble on. They have to do that too. One woman would drive on the Pacific Coast Highway with a client, and he would play the same music every single time. She was like, p"I'm going to kill myself."

PLAYBOY: Most of your interviews happened before the pandemic. How has it impacted the providers' work?

STRUBY: Because of coronavirus, their work has been shut down. However, a lot of them don't rely on this as their sole source of income; a lot of them are in school or are doing something else. But some are getting out of the business, and some are struggling with their identity because of it. It's hard to make that much money and be empowered and then say, "You know what, I'm walking out of here." In a way, it's almost like they are professional athletes with a shelf life. You can only play ball that well for so long.

Trump's Circus of Horrors Continues

Donnie the duffer trades his clubs for a ringmaster's hat as the Republican National Convention showcases the party's lapdogs, attack dogs and dog whistles

BY **BRIAN KAREM** PHOTOS **SHUTTERSTOCK**

Pee-Wee's Big Top—or as some call it, the Republican National Convention—rolled into town this week featuring QAnon supporters, evangelicals, racists, misogynists and assorted nitwits more often seen working the Tilt-A-Whirl at church carnivals somewhere in the Deep South.

In other words, the RNC kicked off its 2020 convention by serving up the same hypocrisy and lies that have been the main course of Trump's administration since Day One.

Children of the South, including those of us from Kentucky, grew up well-versed in this hypocrisy. Where else can you grow up having your parents and politicians teach you that alcohol and marijuana are tools of the devil, while your state leads the country in production of bourbon and "Kentucky Kush"?

Thus it is with Donald Trump. He's taken his cue from the evangelicals of the South who preach about family values while racing through multiple marriages as if they're in a marathon. They moralize about how we should take care of the unborn and newborns but dispose of their own children like they're wrappers on the McDonald's hamburgers they overconsume.

Questions? Ask Jerry Falwell Jr., a Trump supporter who likes to watch, or ask Ted Nugent, another infamous Trumper who once proudly sang, "When in doubt, I whip it out."

The first night of the RNC featured fire and brimstone that would make Old Scratch blush. The speakers, including Jim Jordan, who has the morals of a rabid hamster, spewed more lies in one night than the Democrats managed to tell us in four days.

It was the night after yet another black man was gunned down by police, yet in her speech Nikki Haley calmly insisted, "America is not a racist country." At the same time, Trump's surrogates at the convention claimed he built the best economy in history before the Chinese Communist Party purposely poisoned us with the coronavirus—never fear, Trump will rebuild the economy.

Those who wonder what the Republican Party stands for in 2020 had their question answered by the RNC. The party's platform? Whatever the president wants. We live in "Trump's America," as Donald Trump Jr. told us Monday. Anger, hatred and divisiveness ruled the day. Trump stands for free speech, RNC speakers said, but peaceful protests won't be tolerated. And if you ask President Trump a question he doesn't like, he has a right to ban you from asking anything else, or even being present before his exalted flatulence

The four-day fascist pep rally masquerading as a major political party's national convention has made a mockery of equal rights and equal justice.

Watching the RNC to try to find anything to change your mind? Perhaps First Amendment attorney Ted Boutrous (the lawyer who beat the White House to restore my press hard pass) had the most apt tweet on what to expect: "Not one single person with even the faintest hint of a modicum of credibility on any issue of public concern to this country is slated to speak at the Republican Party convention. Not one."

As for Trump, on the eve of the convention he tweeted, "The greatest Election Fraud in our history is about to happen." He has no evidence to back this claim about an election that has yet to occur. He is laying the groundwork for refusing to leave if he loses. As Paul McCartney once sang, "Everybody's talking about the president / We all chip in for a bag of cement."

The four-day fascist pep rally masquerading as a major political party's national convention has made a mockery of equal rights and equal justice. As Democratic operative Adam Parkhomenko put it in his Today's Big Stuff newsletter, "We tried to watch most of last night's carnival of whining and mediocrity, but we frankly got tired of hearing how not-racist America is while we were waiting to hear if Jacob Blake lived after being shot in the back seven times."

The truth is Trump's insane actions during the last three and a half years have painted him into a corner. His only remaining move is to energize his shrinking base with fear, to motivate them to vote by scaring them into thinking their lives are at stake if he loses.

He's trying to appeal to suburban housewives, but it's a hard sell for a misogynist who has advocated grabbing women by the pussy. Trump extended his appeal to the suburban voter (that's dog-whistle for "white") by inviting Mark and Patricia McCloskey, the gun-toting St. Louis couple who brandished their weapons in public and then seemed shocked they could be charged with a crime, to speak at the RNC.

Yet the entire convention fell short of what we've come to expect from a reality-television star. Why not have the McCloskeys speak from a shooting range while displaying their prowess with firearms? Kimberly Guilfoyle—Donald Trump Jr.'s crazed-cheerleader girlfriend, who spoke on the first night of the convention—was the closest to full-on nuts that the Trump show got. Still, she'd have been funnier in front of a tower of flames yelling, "Burn, baby! Burn!!"

Don Junior? His speech wasn't even that high-energy. Sure, he teared up and gesticulated like a ferret on Benzedrine. But if he had instead chugged a Red Bull and vodka while wearing shorts and a tank top that exposed a "Trump's Amerika!" tattoo, he would have nailed it.

Trump's "crazy" is now just boring. It fails to motivate most of the electorate, playing only to those so far right they believe QAnon is part of the "deep state" and that eating babies and diddling pedophiles is how most people celebrate Christmas.

A retired evangelical doctor I know is representative of this group. She refuses to wear a mask anywhere. She believes Dr. Anthony Fauci is a liar who helped manufacture the coronavirus—he was going to get a multimillion-dollar payoff from "his own miracle vaccine." Bill Gates is in on it too and working with the Chinese Communists to insert microchip tracking into all of us without our knowledge. She swears she'll vote for Trump "half a dozen times if I have to."

This brand of lunacy is all The Donald has left.

Trump has gone so crazy even Kellyanne Conway, mistress of the alternative fact, threw in the towel just before the convention to deal with family matters. Her move, on the eve of destruction (the election), leaves press secretary Kayleigh "Barbie Bobblehead" McEnany and Peter "Never Never Land" Navarro taking up the daily duties of defending Trump. McEnany is neither as smart nor as obstreperous as Conway and comes across like a satanic imp on ether; Navarro leaves the impression of a sad little boy who won't face reality.

That's the Trump "A" Team.

On Saturday Trump tweeted, "The Democrats took the word GOD out of the Pledge of Allegiance at the Democrat National Convention. At first I thought they made a mistake, but it wasn't. It was done on purpose. Remember Evangelical Christians, and ALL, this is where they are coming from-it's done. Vote Nov 3!"

Twenty minutes later he added: "Why would Suburban Women vote for Biden and the Democrats when Democrat run cities are now rampant with crime (and they aren't asking the Federal Government for help) which could easily spread to the suburbs, and they will reconstitute, on steroids, their low income suburbs plan!"

His lazy slide into insanity was evident last Wednesday in the White House briefing room. When asked about his support of GOP candidates who are QAnon conspiracy theorists, Trump said he didn't know much about QAnon and its backers—but since they liked him, it was okay.

He's used that rationale for white supremacists as well. This is a guy desperate for love—so desperate that while he was busy searching for a lost golf ball on the back nine of his Virginia golf club this Sunday, he tweeted "Happy Sunday! We want GOD!"

Things are looking grim for the aging presidential duffer. His favorite nihilist, Steve Bannon, got popped for fraud. His older sister was surreptitiously taped telling people he's a pathological liar and unfit for office Wildfires that have consumed more than a million acres are raging in California. (Apparently residents didn't get Trump's memo about raking forests.) More than 180,000 people in the U.S. have died of coronavirus; the Postal Service has become about as effective as the Pony Express without horses; and Kimberly Guilfoyle shouted to an empty stage at the top of her lungs as if hundreds of thousands of people were sitting in front of her that "the best is yet to come."

Trump's recent trajectory suggests he's a low-velocity firecracker fizzling out. He's not even alarming anymore. He's lost the ability to surprise. He's merely a banal snore fest.

But the RNC cannot change that 2020 is all about Trump. True Republicans long ago abandoned the stage, and some conservatives once considered relatively far right, including former Sen. Jeff Flake, have endorsed Joe Biden

Trump is the ringmaster of his own cancerous political circus, and after three and a half years on the road he is running out of steam. He's lost his mojo. He's mentally and physically unable to function, and those left defending him are as vapid and as empty as the king they worship.

It isn't "Trump's America" no matter how often he preaches it.

It is ours.

Trump is the ringmaster of his own cancerous political circus, and after three and a half years on the road he is running out of steam.

Trump as Breakfast

Does America Want Seconds?

In playful celebration of National Waffle Day, Playboy's art department brings you a visual [illegible] POTUS as the most important meal of the day

Satirical political art has played a significant role in the shaping of America's collective cultural consciousness. From Washington Post cartoonist Herbert "Herblock" Block to The Far Side's Gary Larson, countless artists have made careers out of blending art and wit to distill the joyous, tragic or outrageous complexities of a political moment, person or entire era into a single scene.

Presidents are obvious targets, and the current administration is no exception. From the right-wing memes that helped elect Trump, to Jim Carrey's irreverent cartoons, to New York magazine's deliciously punny im-"peach"-ment cover, to Kathy Griffin's controversial mock-severed head, satirical art in the Trump era is a gift that keeps on giving.

As 66-year proponents of freedom of speech and creative expression, Playboy is no stranger to marrying art with political commentary. We also really like breakfast. It is in the spirit of both that Playboy associate photo editor Lily Ferguson cooked up the following collection of digital collages in honor of National Waffle Day.

Bon appétit.

Brewed Awakening

Doughy Nut

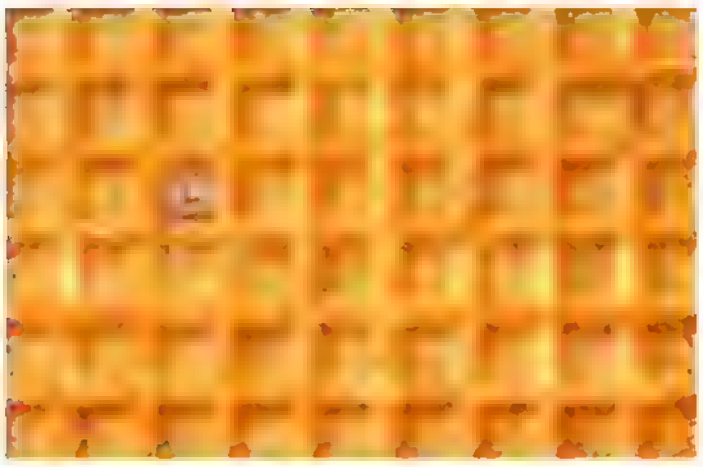
Burnt Out

Cereal Liar

Bad Egg

Short Stack

White Lies



Waffler

Two-Faced

Slimy Sammy

Orange Julius

Bloody Caesar

On Shirts and Skins in the NBA

They might be well-intentioned, but the basketball league's superficial, corporate-approved "statement" jerseys are barely worth a shrug

BY **MIKE JORDAN** ILLUSTRATIONS BY **JACOB ROCHESTER**

It's easy to understand why LeBron James, the NBA's biggest star, decided not to display one of 29 league-approved statements on the back of his Los Angeles Lakers jersey this season in place of his own name.

Two years ago, in one of the most famous instances of white nationalist tap-dancing, Laura Ingraham was miffed that James dared criticize Donald Trump. "It's always unwise to seek political advice from someone who gets paid a hundred million dollars a year to bounce a ball," she told viewers of The Ingraham Angle. High-pitched indignance was in her voice as she mentioned the money.

She concluded her face-baiting two-minute monologue by advising James, one of the most important figures in sports history, to "shut up and dribble." Don't speak out on social issues.

Ingraham's slimy commentary is relevant again today, with the NBA allowing players to put certain social messages on their jersey backs. Disdain for athletes who dare have their own political opinions is not uncommon. Senator Kelly Loeffler of Georgia, minority owner of the Atlanta Dream franchise, said the only message she wants to see on WNBA players' jerseys is the American flag.

I too wouldn't wear a jersey with someone else's message on my back.

Yet the NBA signed off on more than two dozen acceptable statements, including "Speak Up," "Anti-Racist" and "How Many More." In some respects, letting these highly visible individuals "speak" while they actually are dribbling feels like a sincere gesture. But like a tattoo, it superficially allows players to wear their hearts on their sleeves, to adorn themselves in language signifying a sort of dignified dissent. Forty-eight players will display "Black Lives Matter," including Houston Rockets point guard Russell Westbrook. Just five picked "Love U," including 2020 Slam Dunk Contest winner Derrick Jones of the Miami Heat; four selected "Say Her Name," a slogan that many began to use after the death of Sandra Bland and continues to be a rallying cry following the inexcusable police killing of Breonna Taylor. Of the permitted messages, the most popular, according to NBA.com, is "Equality": 17 players (counting the entire Dallas Mavericks roster) will sport the word across their shoulders.

Speaking of shoulders, being a popular professional athlete in America is a little reminiscent of Atlas, one of the Titans of Greek mythology. Not unlike pro players, the Titans were seemingly unrestricted by normal human limitations, achieved great things, inspired others to be more like them and were worshipped for their greatness. When the Titans were defeated by the Olympians, Atlas was made into an example. His body belonged to the conqueror. Atlas was forced to carry the celestial spheres of the heavens on his shoulders. These spheres were said to be made of quintessence, defined by Merriam-Webster as "the essence of a thing in its purest and most concentrated form."

It appears the NBA has begun this pandemic season of basketball with a quintessential example of missing the point. They seem to have been more interested in telegraphing ownership over players instead of giving them freedom on the court to express in their own words solidarity with fans on racial inequality, social injustice, police brutality and extrajudicial killings of unarmed Black men and women.

Along with actual games, these modern titans of the NBA may win the hearts and minds of people who don't yet understand the stakes (that is, if the season survives). But by requiring all the jersey "protest" statements to be management-approved, the league has won the real battle for control of the collective narrative. This is why the NBA's statement-making jerseys are barely worth a shrug.

I too wouldn't wear a jersey with someone else's message on my back. Racial inequities in professional sports, from ownership to coaching, are well-documented. Today, the U.S. is being called to account by African Americans and other minority groups voicing their experiences with racism, highly visible Black athletes are again providing a platform for national conversations of injustice and systemic oppression.

But quasi-customized jerseys bearing pre-selected phrases are hardly what the Founding Fathers fought for, nor what enslaved Africans died for. If we're being real, it's a flaccid attempt by the NBA to feign allyship with the people who suffer most from American oppression.

Underneath it all is the question of ownership. Do players own the shirts on their backs, or even their own bodies, as contractually bound NBA athletes? This is significant, considering that the U.S. was essentially built on the backs of Black Americans whose backs were lashed with whips hundreds of years ago. And under the "leadership" of Donald Trump, Blacks are lashed today with words of intolerance and hate, excusing others to express dominion over our bodies.

Fans expect players to carry and amplify messages they themselves aren't empowered to spread as broadly. Yet if these messages have to be negotiated beforehand, they don't really belong to the players; they belong to the owners. And by putting the owners' messages on the backs of players, by erasing those players' names and voices, the teams essentially treat the players as their own property.

Without more owners with Black skin, it doesn't matter what's on the shirt a player wears. Ultimately, they're still being told to shut up and dribble.

Shit, if I were LeBron James, I'd wear my own name too.

If we're being real, it's a flaccid attempt by the NBA to feign allyship with the people who suffer most from American oppression.

PLAYMATE
Marzia
DORLANDO
Instagram @marziadorlando

Hi I'm marzia I
and I'm an interna
tional dj from a Milan
Italy. I love animals and
freedom.
Everything for me in life
is either black or white
no In betaveens.

Such an honour to have a gorgeous and talented beauty feature! We're curious to know how your journey has been as one of the most respected models in your industry. It's been a cool journey! I started really young when I was 17 and I'm so grateful to this industry because it gave me the opportunity to Travel everywhere in the world and I meet so many different and interesting people, made friends and saw so many cool places.

Tell us something surprising about you? I went to business school and I just created an app that's called s-change where you can exchange things without using money. I had this idea for my app when I was still in school and now it's a reality and I'm really excited about it.

2020 was an incredibly challenging for all us, what would say has been the most challenging thing for you thus far? It was definitely a challenging year for everyone, I would say that for me it was hard when my grandma who's now 90 years old was diagnosed with COVID, we were all really scared she wouldn't make it but she recovered after few weeks and we are all so happy about it. I'm really close to her.

What are some of the things you like to do, behind the cameras and all the glitz and glamour? I love traveling and I can't get enough of it, specially by myself, I love to dive in into new places and cultures and meeting new people. I also love activities, like zip lining, hiking, boxing, jet skiing and anything outdoors and adventurous.

If we were to try and sweep you right off your feet, what are some of the things you look for in an ideal partner? I have very high standard when it comes to my partner, i like someone who is passionate about life like me, ambitious, someone adventurous and fun, but also someone who has a pure heart and cares about other people and the world, Someone romantic and sweet. honesty is another quality that I want in my partner. Look is not important to me, personality is definitely everything. I've always liked nerds because I'm curious about everything and I like to learn.

..And what would make you go running in the opposite direction as fast as possible? Someone who is Self centered, rude, disrespectful, full of himself, not kind or generous.

You're a seemingly talented lady, what are some, if any, of your hidden talents not many people know about? I'm really good at doing hair! It's another of my passions.. My friends are lining up to get their color or cut done and I like to do it for them! Maybe one day I'll open an hair salon as well!

What makes you feel sexy? Sexy for me comes from being confident, showing some skin makes me feel confident, I like clothes as well I think what you wear is a big part of being sexy. But the most important thing is being true to my self and be myself.. and this Playboy cover!!!

If you could have any superpower in the world, what would it be and why? To have the ability to teleport so I could go anywhere I want in the world in seconds! And go see my mom anytime since we live so far away! Not to mention I could go dj in multiple places at once same day.

What can we expect from you this year? Any major plans and exciting things we can look forward to from you? You can expect a lot of new music, I was really inspired the past two years and I spent a lot of time in the studio making new beats. Also my app s-change is coming out this year and I'm really excited I've been working on it for quite some time now!

It has been a true pleasure getting to know you! Any final words for our readers out there? Never give up on your dreams or something that really matters to you, you'll be rewarded when you achieve it! Because anything is possible. I wanted to be on the cover of playboy since ever.. so yes dreams do come true!

Playboy Interview

Keanu Reeves

A candid conversation about voting, technology and paparazzi overreach with the notoriously reclusive Matrix star

INTERVIEW BY **MICHAEL FLEMING** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DJACK GUY**

Keanu Reeves is possibly Hollywood's most elusive megastar, an actor who has managed to remain mysterious on the big screen and even more so in real life. But keeping his fans and critics confused and off-guard has paid off handsomely. Reeves, 41, has packed movie theaters by playing an improbable range of characters in some of the most unforgettable films of the past two decades.

Take, for example, the legendary Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure, a movie m"just stupid enough to be endearing," as one reviewer put it. The role of Ted could easily have pigeonholed Reeves if the actor had not gone on to appear in parts as varied as a Shakespeare-quoting bisexual hustler in My Own Private Idaho (Vincent Canby called Reeves's performance m"very fine") and a stoic cop in the highly caffeinated Speed, in which he uttered such lines as m"Harry, there's enough C-4 on this thing to put a hole in the world!"

Then, of course, there is The Matrix and its sequels, in which Reeves's kung fu and slow-motion bullet dodging make Bruce Lee seem slothful. The three Matrix movies, released in 1999 and 2003, earned upward of $1.6 billion worldwide. Of sci-fi films, only the Star Wars series has made more. Reeves, who shared in the trilogy's profits, took

home more than $150 million.

Along the way, there were flops—forgettable (and forgotten) movies such as Feeling Minnesota, Chain Reaction and Sweet November but there were far more hits, from Much Ado About Nothing, River's Edge and Little Buddha to Something's Gotta Give and Constantine.

Reeves was born in Beirut to an English mother and a father who is part Chinese and part Hawaiian; Reeves's unusual first name is Hawaiian for a"cool breeze over the mountains." His parents split when Reeves was young, and he and his sisters were raised by their mother, mostly in Toronto, where he attended four high schools. He was a skilled ice-hockey goalie, nicknamed the Wall, who dreamed of a pro career that is, until he discovered acting. He dropped out of school when he was 17 and worked steadily as an actor in Canada before moving to Hollywood at the age of 20.

At a time when his fellow stars are acting out in public as well as on film Tom Cruise jumping up and down on Oprah's couch, Russell Crowe tossing a telephone across a hotel lobby Reeves is low-key and silent. His characters say relatively little on-screen, and he says even less off. He has continually declined to comment on some of the most dramatic events in his life, including the tragedy that befell him and his girlfriend Jennifer Syme when their baby was stillborn weeks before its due date in 1999 and Syme's death in a car accident, in 2001. Because of his reluctance to expose his personal life, Reeves remains strangely unknown for such a major star. His interviews are rare, and a lengthy one such as this is almost nonexistent. In addition Reeves avoids the paparazzi, stays out of the limelight and often refuses to answer interviewers' questions at all. That hasn't stopped the rumor mill, however; sketchy blog reports have alleged romances with everyone from Lindsay Lohan to Diane Keaton, his costar in Something's Gotta Give. When asked about her supposed affair with Reeves, Keaton responded "with a disbelieving yelp," according to The New York Times.

One of Reeves's upcoming movies is A Scanner Darkly, based on a futuristic tale by author Philip K. Dick; the movie was shot in live action and then animated. Reeves plays a narcotics officer investigating his own alter ego, a drug-abusing dealer of a dangerous new hallucinogen. "Keanu threw himself into the role," says director Richard Linklater, whose movies include Dazed and Confused and The School of Rock. "There is a beautiful innocence about him, a direct line of empathy that the audience picks up. He feels things deeply and conveys them without saying anything or even displaying them in his face. I think when he looks in the mirror he doesn't see a leading man or even a good-looking guy. At different times he may see a hobo or a guy in an alley, snuffling through life with no food in his refrigerator." Reeves is also reuniting with Sandra Bullock, his bus-driver companion in Speed, for The Lake House.

Playboy sent writer Michael Fleming, who most recently interviewed Jamie Foxx and the Rock, to meet with Reeves. His report: "When he arrived at Le Meridien hotel in Los Angeles, Reeves had longish hair and a substantial black beard ringing his boyish face. It almost seemed as if the growth were intended to give him something to hide behind. He wore a black blazer and gray scarf, never taking either off as we chatted for an afternoon. "Reeves's intelligence may show through in his choice of roles and his measured performances, but boy, is he guarded. He shields his private life more than any movie star I've interviewed. I waited for him to open up, but whenever it got personal, he became uncomfortable and quiet. If not loquacious, he was at least gracious and polite even, I noticed, fanning the smoke from his numerous cigarettes away from me."

PLAYBOY: In your new movie, A Scanner Darkly, you return to the genre of The Matrix, science fiction, this time with a hallucinogenic animation overlay. Are you a sci-fi, techno-obsessed, geeky kind of guy?

REEVES: Me? I don't even have a computer.

PLAYBOY: Neo from The Matrix has no computer?

REEVES: That's right. It always made [Matrix directors] Larry and Andy Wachowski laugh

PLAYBOY: How have you avoided owning a computer in 2006?

REEVES: I'm more interested in people than technology. I'm not a gearhead.

PLAYBOY: How about a BlackBerry? Can you be a Hollywood celebrity without one?

REEVES: Yes. With all technology, I am interested in the ideas, what it means sociologically. I love reading about inventions, knowing why and how people use them the internet and the rest but I'm far more fascinated by the human aspects. As far as I can tell, devices meant to save you time and help you communicate actually take away time and give you an excuse not to communicate. People like e-mail because they don't have to answer it. You want to talk to people, but you get less time to do it. I prefer letters. I like to write them.

PLAYBOY: In longhand?

REEVES: On a typewriter.

PLAYBOY: Do you use Wite-Out for your mistakes?

REEVES: Nah. I put Xs through mistakes. That's part of the charm.

PLAYBOY: If Star Wars is the standard, where does the Matrix trilogy rank in the pantheon of science-fiction franchises? Financially, it's number two.

REEVES: I would say we're the new number one. Everyone has their own ranking, but The Matrix is definitely my favorite. I still get protective about it. I got so mad when The Matrix wasn't nominated for an Academy Award last time.

PLAYBOY: An Academy Award for

REEVES: At least for the special effects. Are you fucking kidding me? Are you fucking insane?

PLAYBOY: The first Matrix movie came out right before the first Star Wars prequel. By comparison The Matrix was reviewed as fresh and cutting-edge. It developed a cult following and inspired fashion trends, and the entire series took in more than $1.5 billion. When you first read the script, did you imagine it would become such a sensation?

REEVES: I didn't, though I saw a great script and a great story. The ideas pushed the envelope in science fiction. I had never heard of anything like The Matrix before. I hadn't seen any of those ideas before—a guy living in a dream. They were going to slow down the action scenes, and there was this kung fu stuff. I loved all that. I knew it was going to be hard work I recognized the effort it would take—but it excited me.

PLAYBOY: When you look back, do you remember the effort or the movies' success?

REEVES: It was very exciting to work on those films. I feel very grateful for how my life changed because of them what I went through, the people I met. Neo has a relationship to humans, to machines and to energy itself. What does he ask for? Peace. I think that's one of the best messages we can strive for. I have strong feelings about that message. That part of it helped me get through the experience.

PLAYBOY: Reportedly, you and numerous co-stars were injured while making those movies. How badly were you banged up?

REEVES: My knees aren't the same. They're just not. I have to get them scoped.

PLAYBOY: Because of the kung fu scenes?

REEVES: Yeah, though it was just movie kung fu, not the real stuff. We hit each other only a couple of times, so it wasn't that bad.

But people broke things. Carrie-Anne Moss hurt her leg, and Hugo Weaving had to have a hole drilled into his hip to drain some fluid. I was taking ice baths and massages and trying not to cry at

night. But would I do it again? Absolutely.

I'm still kind of tired from it, though. I'm still recovering. Five or six months ago I remember saying to a friend that I finally felt as if I'd processed the first Matrix.

PLAYBOY: Five months ago? That film came out in 1999.

REEVES: Yeah, but I'm a sensitive guy. The first shoot was eight months, and the second was 22 months. My stunt double told me I did more wire work than 90 percent of the stuntmen in the business.

PLAYBOY: After shoots like those, do you stay in touch with the directors and cast?

REEVES: Yes. I saw Laurence Fishburne just the other day. I bought him some artwork for his new house. I haven't seen Carrie-Anne for a while. I saw Hugo at a film festival a few months back. All the people we're speaking about are my friends. If I got married, they'd all be invited.

PLAYBOY: When it finally shuts down, how do you get an intensive shoot like The Matrix out of your system? Do you get lost for three weeks?

REEVES: Three weeks? Is that all I get? Normally when I finish work, I'm very tired but also restless. I look to reconnect with friends. I ride my bike.

PLAYBOY: Where?

REEVES: I mainly just ride around town, seeking sunsets and the ocean. I ride around the canyons or Malibu.

PLAYBOY: You've had several notable accidents. Have your injuries affected your riding?

REEVES: I still ride every day, pretty much.

PLAYBOY: Which is your favorite bike?

REEVES: A 1974 Norton Commando 850. It's an English sport touring twin. Comfortable. You can go up to San Francisco in a jump.

PLAYBOY: One of your well-publicized spills temporarily messed up your face pretty well. Do you wear a helmet now?

REEVES: It's the law, so now I do, except when I'm in places that have no helmet laws.

PLAYBOY: A lot is riding on you when you star in a film. Are you contractually restricted from riding motorcycles when you're shooting a movie?

REEVES: Sometimes I have to state my position, to say whether I will or won't ride.

PLAYBOY: You have said you like going on what you call the devil ride. What is it?

REEVES: There are a couple of spots on Mulholland Drive in the Hollywood Hills, where, if there's a good moon out, you can coast all the way down toward the ocean. You shut off your lights and go. It's very quiet. You're guided by the moonlight. It's very pleasant. It's not like I'm howling at the moon, but it's quiet, and you can hear and feel the breeze. There is a certain aspect to riding. You're getting away and enjoying nature and riding. You can't daydream when you ride. You have to be here now.

PLAYBOY: Is the thrill, as well as the danger, part of the attraction?

REEVES: Well, I'm not looking to get into any mishaps.

PLAYBOY: What caused your accidents?

REEVES: I've had a few of them. I crashed a few times. Once a car pulled a U-turn from a parking space in front of me into my lane. The driver couldn't see me coming, and I couldn't get out of the way. That one is responsible for my fake teeth—my teeth replacements.

PLAYBOY: How badly were you hurt?

REEVES: I sheared some skin off my right shin. I broke my ankle and a couple of teeth. Not so bad.

PLAYBOY: Easy for you to say. And you have a scar on your abdomen. From what?

REEVES: That was from running into the hillside. I took a turn a little too fast and just ran out of road.

PLAYBOY: Do these accidents ever make you consider quitting?

REEVES: No. After an accident I just vow to go a little slower.

PLAYBOY: How quickly do you get back on the bike afterward?

REEVES: As soon as I heal up.

PLAYBOY: In addition to riding, do you work out?

REEVES: I guess it depends on the day.

PLAYBOY: Do you try to stay in shape? What regimen do you have?

REEVES: Eat right, get plenty of rest.

PLAYBOY: Do you go to the gym? Do any Pilates?

REEVES: Nah. I'm an old-fashioned guy. I lift some, and I run.

PLAYBOY: How about fashion trends? What do your long hair and beard say about you? Would you define your look as more slacker or fashion plate?

REEVES: I wouldn't describe myself as a slacker or a fashion plate. I visit both of those worlds. I like to get dressed up once in a while.

PLAYBOY: Do you wear a character around after the workday is over?

REEVES: I tend to bring it home until I feel I know the guy I'm playing. If I'm doing an accent, I may answer the phone in the accent. When I worked on Sam Raimi's The Gift, I was going to bars and hanging out, jumping into the truck and wearing thick clothes. I enjoy that process of immersing myself in a character.

PLAYBOY: How much of a stretch was it to play a wife beater in The Gift? He was a brutal guy. Besides the accent and clothes, did you bring him home?

REEVES: I said no a lot more than I usually do. I wasn't as polite as I usually am.

"People like e-mail because they don't have to answer it. I don't even have a computer."

PLAYBOY: Hilary Swank played your wife and was the recipient of your brutality. How did it feel to summon that rage and bully a woman?

REEVES: A part of me was afraid of my violent side. Once Hilary and I were improvising in a trailer. I just kept saying, g"You're lying. You're lying. You're lying." We were rehearsing this argument, and Sam said, "Every time you say, g'You're lying,' instead of saying it, just hit her." Hilary was like, "No, Donnie, I wasn't " [makes slapping noise] m"Donnie, I wasn't " [slaps] Sam was like, m"Grab her face." This went on until finally I pushed her up against the wall and started taking her pants off. I stopped, but it was very scary. It was like, "Oh, shit. Okay. Now I get it. I get it." It was very frightening.

PLAYBOY: Did it help Swank prepare for her role in Million Dollar Baby?

REEVES: [*Laughs*] Yeah. And by the way, I also learned a bit of... well, that some of the ladies don't mind it, so... Nah, that's awful to say.

PLAYBOY: In one of your next movies you're playing Hollywood mobster Johnny Stompanato. Catherine Zeta-Jones plays his girlfriend Lana Turner. Stompanato was a small-time L.A. gangster with

a legendary temper. Turner's daughter, Cheryl, stabbed him to death to save her mother. Was he similar to the character in The Gift?

REEVES: I found it interesting that Stompanato had this temper but that he was trying to control and civilize it. He didn't want to be a thug. He didn't want to be Mickey Cohen's tough guy. I liked the struggle of a violent guy who tries to change his nature.

PLAYBOY: By the time of The Gift, you had become one of the highest-paid actors in Hollywood. It has been reported that you made more than $150 million on the three Matrix films—one of the more lucrative movie-star paydays in history. Before that you had a reputation for living a modest existence. Does such a windfall dramatically change the way you live?

REEVES: Yes. It definitely changed the way I can live. Absolutely.

PLAYBOY: But has it? How?

REEVES: I can buy my mom a house, which is great. Then I can do the renovation. And yes, I can expand my level of philanthropy. A lot of things in my life extended out. How I am personally isn't really affected by it, but my life is. I'm still pretty sparing, though. I haven't gone nuts. I haven't changed much of my lifestyle. No, I don't have a jet.

PLAYBOY: After having long been content to live in hotels, you bought a house. As you get older is it more important to put down roots?

REEVES: That's how I would put it. I guess I was looking for something more. Yeah, and this is after living in the Chateau Marmont for four years in the 1990s.

PLAYBOY: What's the best thing about living in a hotel for four years?

REEVES: Room service. Overall it was good fun, but the fun has to stop at some point. It was time to check out. Now it's nice to have a home.

PLAYBOY: Do you make your own bed?

REEVES: I do. It's good to make your own bed and do your own dishes.

"Robert De Niro once spoke about the loss of his privacy, how he missed the ability to be a voyeur, to look at other people. As an actor, you don't want to lose that."

PLAYBOY: Did you decorate your house yourself?

REEVES: Yes. It's kind of modern. Modern comfy, if that's possible.

PLAYBOY: How else has your life changed since The Matrix? Can you go out and be anonymous, or is that time gone?

REEVES: It's important to do it still. Robert De Niro once spoke about the loss of his privacy, how he missed the ability to be a voyeur, to look at other people. As an actor, you don't want to lose that. I can still walk around, do what I need to and not be bothered much.

PLAYBOY: How does it feel when strangers come up and act as if they know you?

REEVES: It's generally nice if people want to say hi. I can move around the world pretty freely. No one freaks out.

PLAYBOY: Can you still go to the mall—anywhere you want?

REEVES: Yeah, absolutely. I went to the movies the other night. It was fine. I got recognized a couple of times, but it's no big deal. You never get supercomfortable with that, but in my experience it's usually pretty much g"Hi" and "Can you sign this?" which is fine.

PLAYBOY: After three Matrix films, you did Constantine and Thumbsucker, an art-house film about a guy with an oral fixation. Upcoming you have The Lake House, with Sandra Bullock, and A Scanner Darkly—four utterly different types of movies. After the second Bill & Ted's, you played a bisexual hustler in My Own Private Idaho. Are you intentionally trying to mix it up? Is one film a reaction to the one that preceded it?

REEVES: One film isn't a reaction to the last as much as it is just finding something I'm interested in. At the same time, I don't want to become g"that guy" or be known for any one thing. I'd like to be able to do any kind of role in any kind of film.

PLAYBOY: Was it difficult for you to shake the perception of being an airhead from Bill & Ted's? Did it make it harder to get the next job?

REEVES: It wasn't as hard for me to shake the perception as it seemed to be for other people. [Laughs] I must have done a good job, because some people thought that was who I was

PLAYBOY: Were you in high demand for roles that required an air-guitar solo?

REEVES: I never got that. People in the business never seemed to pigeonhole me because of the role, though sometimes I'd get it critically and socially.

PLAYBOY: Now critics finally seem to appreciate your work more than at any other time. Have you gotten better, or have they caught on?

REEVES: [*Groans*] Have I gotten better, or have they caught on? I feel like I've grown in my craft. I plan to continue that. In terms of catching on, I don't really know Whatever

PLAYBOY: You received good reviews for My Own Private Idaho. Your on-screen relationship with River Phoenix is as intimate and daring as the relationship in Brokeback Mountain. What was the reaction to that movie?

REEVES: My Own Private Idaho was well received, but the reaction had a lot to do with the film's structure. In the middle you have Shakespeare. You have street kids, homosexuality, father-son stuff. There is no straight, direct dramatic narrative

PLAYBOY: If it had come out today, would it be embraced like Brokeback Mountain? Is there more openness to the depiction of homosexual and bisexual relationships now than when My Own Private Idaho came out in 1991?

REEVES: I think so. Brokeback Mountain has been put on a platform as a love story. Is it a more open world because it's a story about love between two men? Well, we've got gay marriage now. So I guess, yes. Idaho still holds up, by the way. I saw it recently. It has aged well.

PLAYBOY: And you? Are there qualities in your acting now that you're 40 that weren't there when you were 20 or even 30?

REEVES: I don't know. I don't look at myself like that. I just look forward to what happens next.

PLAYBOY: Does it worry you to get older in a business that reveres youth?

REEVES: No, I don't have that worry. I look at it differently. I look

at Macbeth and wonder, Do I have the stature yet? Do I look too young? That's one I'd like to do. I want to be able to do it and feel like I know what I'm talking about. I just hope I don't have to age too hard to earn it.

PLAYBOY: You have said you stank in Francis Ford Coppola's Dracula. What was wrong with your performance?

REEVES: When I went into the picture, I had done a lot of work—three films in a year. I was psychically beat-up, fragile and not so confident. Actually, I saw that film again about a year ago, and it was okay. As arch as all the other performances were, mine was suitable.

PLAYBOY: Speed made you a bankable leading man. Did you sense in advance that it would?

REEVES: No. What I saw in the script was an action film and a chance to humanize the action hero. At the time, that type of role was changing after Bruce Willis did Die Hard. My performance was in the spirit of the change to more character-based interpretations of the action hero.

PLAYBOY: Why did you turn down Speed 2? In retrospect it was a good decision, but the original Speed was a blockbuster.

REEVES: Aw, this is all ancient history.

PLAYBOY: But it's not a painful memory?

REEVES: [*Laughs*] Good ancient history.

PLAYBOY: Why did you say no?

REEVES: At the time, I didn't feel the script and story were things that needed to be made.

PLAYBOY: Because a boat moving through water doesn't visually convey the danger of a speeding bus?

REEVES: That was one of my major points. [*Laughs*] My idea was to have my character traveling through the whole film, trying to propose to Sandra with all these obstacles getting in the way. That would have been charming. But also, when the film came around, I wasn't ready to go run and jump. I was in the middle of finishing Chain Reaction. I just didn't feel like running and jumping anymore. So I played Hamlet, and that was fine.

"No one wants their private life intruded upon by long-lens cameras and flashbulbs."

PLAYBOY: Years later why did you agree to make Something's Gotta Give? It had all the markings of a corny chick flick, though it became a hit and revived the genre of smart adult films.

REEVES: I thought it was a great story, incredibly well written by director Nancy Meyers. And I got the chance to work with Jack Nicholson and Diane Keaton. I liked the humanity of my character, that he was a heart doctor in a story about matters of the heart. There was a nice dignity to him, so I didn't mind not getting the girl.

PLAYBOY: Were you nervous working with Nicholson? Were you more nervous working with him than with other iconic co-stars?

REEVES: I was probably most nervous at a rehearsal of The Devil's Advocate with Al Pacino. It was in a studio loft in Manhattan, where we sat on a couple of chairs that were substituting for a subway bench. It was the first time I got to roll up my sleeves with a master. Yeah, I was nervous. But Pacino is a very generous actor, a lovely man. That got me past it. This was my opportunity, as Laurence Fishburne always says, to swing.

PLAYBOY: To swing?

REEVES: You know, g"Let's swing, man. Let's go. Let's hit it out of the park."*

PLAYBOY: You left high school to act. Was it a difficult decision?

REEVES: No, because I'd made the decision to act before I went to high school.

PLAYBOY: Was your mother worried about your quitting school?

REEVES: No, she was very supportive. No one tried to hold me back.

PLAYBOY: While it lasted, were you a good student?

REEVES: I was okay. I went to four high schools in five years. I went to one right after grade school for two years. Then I went to a performing-arts high school for a year. I got kicked out and went to a Catholic boys' high school to play hockey. That's where I did my first play. After that I went to a free school so I could work while getting my education. Then I dropped out.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any misgivings about not finishing high school and following the traditional path to college?

REEVES: No, because I'd started working as an actor. That's what I wanted to do.

PLAYBOY: When did you initially go to Hollywood to act?

REEVES: I was 20. I got a green card, got in my old car and drove across the border from Canada. I stayed half a year with my stepfather, who was a writer and director. He let me stay in his guest bedroom because I didn't know anybody out here. Then I made some friends, and I got an apartment and a roommate.

PLAYBOY: Were you at all homesick?

REEVES: Not at all. I was so ready to leave. I'd moved out of the house when I was 17 or 18.

PLAYBOY: How long did it take you to get established? Were there setbacks?

REEVES: I had the courage of youth. I had done a movie of the week in Canada. By the time I arrived in L.A., I had a manager and an agent. I came out with my head shots and went to auditions. After eight months of hearing no, I got my first break in a TV movie.

PLAYBOY: Now, after being in L.A. for 20 years, are you cynical about Hollywood and the movie business?

REEVES: Absolutely not. Hopefully I never will be.

PLAYBOY: There's probably not much ice hockey in Hollywood, yet you were an ice-hockey goalie in high school. Do you still play?

REEVES: I played five or six years ago, when my knees were better. I played a lot of hockey. I played in some under-30 and then over-30 leagues in L.A. I got awards for best goalie and best goals against. One year I got a trophy.

PLAYBOY: Your nickname when you played in high school, the Wall, suggests you were a force to be reckoned with. Did you ever aspire to play pro hockey?

REEVES: When I was 17, I was on the edge. I had a tryout for a major junior A team, which I didn't go to because I did a play instead.

PLAYBOY: After The Matrix, motorcycle accidents and ice hockey, how bad are your knees?

REEVES: Now it's hard for me even to play. My knees will get swollen. And then there was the neck surgery.

PLAYBOY: For what?

REEVES: I just had two cervical discs removed, but I'm still going to play some hockey. I'd like to get back in the net.

PLAYBOY: Tabloids track most stars' every step. They report rumors, but you generally seem to exist outside their glare. How have you managed that?

REEVES: I lead a very quiet life. I don't get out much. It's kind of sad, but—ah, well.

PLAYBOY: How troubling are the tabloids and paparazzi?
REEVES: No one wants their private life intruded upon by long-lens cameras and flashbulbs. It's more prevalent in Hollywood than it used to be. There are more photos of people going to eat and coming out of clubs. It's unavoidable.
PLAYBOY: Most stars engage lawyers to deny stories and threaten lawsuits as soon as a tabloid publishes something scurrilous. When unfounded reports surfaced that you'd married David Geffen, did you feel the need to defend yourself and refute them?
REEVES: No. When you say defend, in that case it comes down to making a judgment about being gay or not. I try not to live my life by what other people say.
PLAYBOY: Did the report about Geffen make you angry?
REEVES: No, man. To me, it's just bullshit. Like I said, rumors, all that kind of stuff. It's like, whatever.
PLAYBOY: Do you read the tabloids? Do you understand the appeal?
REEVES: People were gossiping about what the king and queen were doing way back when. It's just human nature. We like talking about other people.
PLAYBOY: Do you get drawn in?
REEVES: I get inoculated every year, so I don't.
PLAYBOY: Are you forgiving of the press?
REEVES: I don't think it has the right to peer over the fence or stalk me. It doesn't have a right to my private life.
PLAYBOY: Do you imagine using your celebrity to push politics the way Bono does?
REEVES: I don't have it in me. He's a remarkable man and a remarkable performer. I don't have that kind of scale in me, but I am involved in foundations.
PLAYBOY: Could you see yourself ever publicly backing a political candidate?
REEVES: I like to do things quietly. That's my style. For now.
PLAYBOY: George Clooney has made a series of political movies—Syriana and Good Night, and Good Luck. Do you ever consider making movies that would push your politics?
REEVES: It's not to my taste. It's admirable and important but not my style right now. My life now is smaller-scale. I get involved in certain philanthropic entities, but I like to go the private way.
PLAYBOY: Can you vote in the United States?
REEVES: No, I can't. I'm still a Canadian citizen.
PLAYBOY: Do you vote there?
REEVES: I don't participate in Canada, either. I guess one can say that, beyond social and human politics, I'm not a political person. I haven't voted. This is something I'd actually like to change.
PLAYBOY: Do you want to vote here?
REEVES: Yeah, and become a U.S. citizen. I realize I want to participate in different ways than I have been able to.
PLAYBOY: According to press reports, you never had a relationship with your father. Is he in your life now?
REEVES: No.
PLAYBOY: Do you know where he lives?
REEVES: In Hawaii
PLAYBOY: Might you try to establish a relationship with him?
REEVES: I don't know. I just don't know.
PLAYBOY: Are you close with your mother and the rest of your family? Where are they?
REEVES: I have a sister in Italy and one in Seattle. My mother lives here. My family is pretty close. We see each other on holidays, whenever we can
PLAYBOY: Along with acting, you apparently enjoy rock and roll. Do you still play bass in a rock band?
REEVES: No, I don't. I stopped about eight months ago. The band wanted to go on tour and make records, as opposed to just playing when we could. I felt like I was in their way. I stepped aside.
PLAYBOY: The band got much of its attention and a record deal primarily because you were in it.
REEVES: Yeah, but we hard-earned that after, like, seven years.
PLAYBOY: While your fame helped in some ways, did it also put pressure on the band?
REEVES: In the beginning, yeah. But if you're going to play music, shut up and play. If you don't want it to happen, stay home. Still, sometimes it was uncomfortable. We were a new band, and 3,000 people were coming out to see us play.
PLAYBOY: Where do you feel more naked: playing a new song live or opening in a play?
REEVES: Both sound pretty good. I like that excitement. I'm most comfortable onstage performing. When I'm acting onstage, I feel very much at home, more so than I do when performing music.
PLAYBOY: What gave you a bigger rush, opening for Bon Jovi, seeing The Matrix for the first time or being onstage in a play?
REEVES: Opening night onstage, but opening for Bon Jovi was fun. That was one of our first big concerts. Being amplified in the Forum is pretty awesome. The drums are like, boom! The bass. You feel the whole place moving. There's so much sound coming out, your pants are vibrating
PLAYBOY: Is there more camaraderie between bandmates on the road or between cast members on location?
REEVES: They rival each other. You probably learn more about the personal foibles of the band on the road in a van or bus. You learn what everybody looks like at four a.m. The musician's life is a little more of the pirate's.
PLAYBOY: Will you play in another band?
REEVES: No.
PLAYBOY: Because you know you aren't likely to achieve in music what you have as an actor?
REEVES: No, it's not about that. I enjoyed the creative process. I loved playing shows and making music. There's nothing like writing a song for the first time and having a band come together and play it and then playing it live.
PLAYBOY: Then why did you quit the band?
REEVES: I'm 41 years old. I did the band for about nine years long enough. It's just about finding time. I have too much else to do.
PLAYBOY: As you think about the future, do you see yourself sitting around the house, with a bunch of kids running around and a gut? George Clooney, a terminal bachelor, says it'll never happen for him. But he has a pot-bellied pig.
REEVES: Well, that goes to show you. We all need surrogates. It's nature. It's Darwin calling. What is it? g"Nature is railing a siren song, and not to answer is not to belong. The world must be peopled." Yeah, that impulse is definitely alive and well in me. Yeah A gut and some kids? Why not?

"I lead a very quiet life. I don't get out much. It's kind of sad, but—ah, well."

Hole *in* None

From the comfort of his cushy private golf club, Trump signs executive orders that won't do anything but spark class war

WRITTEN BY
BRIAN KAREM

PHOTO BY
WILLROW HOOD

It's hard to decide if Donald Trump is trying to ignite a class war or if his actions are just a by-product of his growing insanity and overriding stupidity.

It could be both—we can never completely write off that possibility.

On Saturday the septuagenarian president did his best to convince the country he was helping the economy, when he was really trying to lie, cheat and steal his way through another weekend in Bedminster, screwing the working class in the process.

Gathered for news conferences at his New Jersey golf club, his sycophants cheered him on and stridently booed a reporter who asked about wearing masks. Trump walked out of the late afternoon briefing when Paula Reid from CBS asked him about lying to the American people. His fans cheered.

The press conference came on the heels of Trump signing four executive measures relating to coronavirus relief. He had to take action, he told us, because Congress failed to act.

He wasn't wrong about that. The Senate Republicans—led by Satan's towel boy Mitch McConnell—have refused to take up legislation the House passed three months ago. The Republicans blame the Democrats, but what else can they do?

Trump hasn't and apparently won't talk to Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, let alone anyone else in the Democratic Party, and the Republicans seem to think that giving an extra $600 a week to unemployed Americans will incentivize those workers not to work.

Meanwhile, Republicans don't mind bailing out large corporations to the tune of billions of dollars. None of this is a surprise. None of it is unexpected.

That's the bottom line to the United States in 2020. The pandemic has exposed the American government—not just the president, but (practically) the entire government—for what it is: an ineffective group of self-entitled hypocrites who are watching the country burn and doing nothing about it.

This has prompted pushback from Democrats, the press and some Republicans with their senses intact who, as the election approaches, are staring at the lava pits of hell and warning about the American slide into the abyss.

For those who remember the comedian Bill Hicks, his words remain haunting: "Go back to bed America.... You are free to do as we tell you."

The apex predator remains Donald Trump. His niece, Mary Trump, in her book Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man, points out how The Donald's father, an unloving and cold man, helped shape the president we are saddled with today. "Everyone talks about how his staff is always playing to the 'audience of one,' but what they don't realize is the president is always playing to an audience of one—his dead father," Mary Trump told me recently.

She remains unmoved by the president's constant complaints and whining. "What does he have to complain about? And that's all he does…because he's very empty. Money in my family stood in for everything else," she said. "When you've never been loved or respected in a real way, then nothing can make up for those losses. He's human and he's got to make up for it some way."

Logic doesn't matter to President Trump. Empathy is for losers, and whatever Trump wants is the only thing that matters to the spoiled brat who squats in the West Wing and fails to do the job he was elected to do.

All that's left is the gas. On Tuesday the president blasted former national security advisor John Bolton on Twitter: "John Bolton, one of the dumbest people I've met in government and sadly, I've met plenty...." Bolton recently published a book, and like most of the other new books about Trump, it doesn't paint the former reality television star in a good light. But the tweet begs the question: If Bolton is one of the dumbest people Trump has met,

"When he loses in November he will regret all the time he spent trolling his fellow citi-zens."

then why did he hire him? Logic need not apply.

Trump also lashed out against another former employee, Anthony Scaramucci, who appeared on Fox News over the weekend to say that Trump is guaranteeing the Republican Party will be a minority party for the next generation. In response, Trump tweeted that Scaramucci "just made a fool of himself." The president did not address the very real issue his former communications director raised.

Trump was too busy telling us the flu of 1917 (it was 1918) helped end World War II (it was 1945) and accusing Barack Obama's campaign of treason.

"The president has failed at his job," Scaramucci told me Monday. "Plain and simple. When I spoke the crystal-clear truth on a show he watches, it triggered him. When he loses in November he will regret all the time he spent trolling his fellow citizens."

Staffers who still work for the president and fear they will be out of a job after the November election agree with Scaramucci's assessment of what Trump has done to the GOP but don't believe he'll ever have any regret.

"If he loses, which is looking increasingly possible," a senior staff member told me on background, "I doubt that he'll ever have any regrets or say anything more than 'It's a hoax' and encourage violence."

The end game may be the ultimate con game. The scenarios vary if Trump loses but always end with Trump ultimately leaving office. Those closest to him remain unsure he ever really wanted the job.

Despite trade director Peter Navarro and chief of staff Mark Meadows insisting Trump is the hardest-working president ever, one merely need look at the time he has spent playing golf (267 days of his presidency) to know that is another lie.

That brings us back to The Donald's weekend in Bedminster. He signed what he refers to as

four executive orders (three of them were really memoranda). He told us he was going to make sure out-of-work Americans get $400 a week extra instead of the $600 they were getting and blamed the Democrats for the difference. But members of the Covid-19 Congressional Oversight Commission, which is tasked with overseeing the Treasury's and the Federal Reserve Board's management of stimulus and loan programs mandated by the CARES Act, spoke out about the reality of Trump's orders. Of course reality doesn't match Donald's claims.

The $400 is actually only $300—half of what unemployed workers were getting.

"On unemployment insurance, evictions, and on student loans, these orders and memoranda—even if they are found legal—provide far, far less relief than what Democrats provided in the HEROES Act that passed three months ago and has languished in the Senate ever since," tweeted Bharat Ramamurti, a member of the Covid-19 commission.

He and others have pointed out that Trump's so-called executive orders, including one that could potentially eliminate the funding for Social Security, are all legally dubious. But the orders do expose a simple truth: Nuts or not, Donald Trump doesn't care about the people he represents unless they are white and have plenty of money. He's eager to line the pockets of the rich, to take away from the poor and to whine about people who recognize these facts.

He's a reverse Robin Hood. Mary Trump says there is only one way to handle him. "Call him out on his lies," she told me. "He's saying the Democrats walked away, and he's lying."

As we consider what to do about Trump, the pandemic and our broken government, consider once again the wisdom of Bill Hicks, who nearly three decades ago often closed his act with a thought about making a choice "between fear and love."

"The eyes of fear want you to put bigger locks on your doors, buy guns, close yourself off. The eyes of love instead see all of us as one," Hicks said. "Here's what we can do to change the world, right now, to a better ride. Take all that money we spend on weapons and defense each year and instead spend it feeding and clothing and educating the poor of the world, which it would many times over not one human being excluded and we could explore space, together, both inner and outer, forever, in peace."

Our choice has never been simpler

One of Trump's Tuesday tweets sounds almost like a response to Hicks: "More Testing, which is a good thing (we have the most in the world), equals more Cases, which is Fake News Gold. They use Cases to demean the incredible job being done by the great men & women of the U.S. fighting the China Plague!"

Donald Trump doesn't care about the people he represents unless they are white and have plenty of money.

Appealing to fear is all The Donald has left.

Now that his presumptive Democratic challenger Joe Biden has picked Kamala Harris as his running mate, Trump even has more to fear. As he slowly walked into the briefing room Tuesday evening he seemed tired, lethargic, unaware. Moments earlier he had tweeted a video calling Kamala Harris a phony.

He rambled on with his greatest hits about anarchists and the radical left. He said little about the pandemic in a briefing called to address the coronavirus.

He looked at me standing in the back of the room and squinted in my direction. He called on the OANN reporter. So as he left I shouted, "Mr. President, when are you going to stop lying to the American people?"

The great prevaricator walked slowly off stage, as if in a trance.

The rest of the country feels the same way.

JESSIE

Sims

Jessie! great to have you back on the cover this month! How is 2021 shaping up for you so far? Thank you, I'm excited to be back. 2021 has been great so far! A lot of new opportunities have popped up so far. Hopefully more to come as the world starts to open back up after the crazy year we've had.

Can you describe to us what your typical day looks like during these covid times? 8:30am wake up & have a small breakfast.

9am drive to Beverly Hills to meet with my personal trainer.

Noon drive home, have lunch, shower and start getting ready to create content for my social media platforms.

Evening unwind if I don't have any emails or editing to do.

I've been trying to stay busy and keep challenging myself to stick to a routine.

Tell us something surprising about you? I was a tomboy growing up. I hated girly things. You wouldn't catch me dead in a dress or the color pink. I was always rough housing with the boys, playing in the mud, watching WWE or playing video games.

I even told my parents that I wanted to be a professional wrestler.

Three things you used to think you can't live without, but now have come to find aren't essential to you anymore over this rough period? Parties, music festivals/concerts and pretty much large social gatherings as a whole. They may be fun but definitely not essential. I've been pretty cautious about interacting with other people and staying home through this whole pandemic. I had one lapse in judgement on my birthday. I decided to go on an impromptu trip to Mexico with my best friend to celebrate our birthdays and a split from my ex. It was a poor choice on my part and I ended up catching COVID so that gave me a pretty big reality check.

What are some of the things you like to do, behind the cameras and all the glitz and glamour? Spend time with my family or just relax and get away from technology. It is quite difficult to find a balance between my personal life and social media since I pretty much broadcast my life online. If I am doing anything fun I always have to stop and film it or take photos since it is something that would make for good content. I guess you could say that the wheels are always turning in my brain and I am a bit of a workaholic.

If we were to try and sweep you right off your feet, what are some of the things you look for in an ideal partner? It is pretty sad to say but at this point I just want someone genuine and caring. Those are the two main factors. My ideal partner would be family oriented, hard working/determined, goal oriented, ambitious, creative, spontaneous, athletic, outgoing, adventurous and dedicated.

..And what would make you go running in the opposite direction as fast as possible? Someone who is rude to other people, lacks drive/ambitions, self centered/egotistical.

You're a seemingly talented lady, what are some, if any, of your hidden talents not many people know about? I was a gymnast growing up. I loved to flip and tried anything that would give me an adrenaline rush. Gymnastics was my whole identity from late 8th grade to my Sophomore year in college when I dropped out and moved to California. I practiced for about a year after moving to California but unfortunately injury stopped me from continuing.

What makes you feel sexy? A nice tan and getting my hair and makeup done.

If you could have any superpower in the world, what would it be and why? Definitely to teleport because traffic in LA and southern California is insane! I'd get so much more accomplished. Also, that would just be super convenient and fun.

What more can we expect from you this year? Any major plans and exciting things we can look forward to from you? A lot of content, collaborations and some new merch! I am also working on an Indie Horror Film that will be released in 2022.

It has been a true pleasure getting to know you! Any final words for our readers out there? Thanks again! I'm so grateful to have the opportunity to be a part of Playboy once again. If you're not already keeping up with my crazy antics check out my social media all my links are listed here

Except TikTok that is just @jessiesims :)

Fools, Damn Fools *and* Donald Trump

The president is circling the drain, and that giant flushing sound comes from members of his own party pulling the chain

BY **BRIAN KAREM**

Reality and energy are in short supply at the White House.

On Tuesday morning Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany, the latest soon-to-be-erstwhile keeper of the Trump administration's propaganda, called a press briefing for noon.

About 15 minutes past noon, a young press assistant blurted over the West Wing speaker system the briefing would begin at 12:30 p.m. Shortly after the appointed time, the same assistant dutifully announced a "two-minute warning" to let us know the briefing would soon begin. Nothing happened. Then just before 1 p.m. the disembodied voice reassured us with a "real two-minute warning."

I sighed. Thus it is with this White House. Nothing is real, and nothing to get hung about but it's not John Lennon's "Strawberry Fields Forever." It's the White House in the dog days of August 2020, and Donald Trump—when he's capable of a cogent thought that doesn't involve a Happy Meal is scared to death he's going to lose the November general election.

McEnany seemed muted, delivering her propaganda with little gusto. The atmosphere was in line with the feeling of dread that permeates the White House and everything Trump and his staff do, and that mood filters down to the press corps covering the chaos. As I waited for McEnany's briefing to begin, I felt out of sorts. A strong sense of ennui and déjà vu came over me.

Shortly after covering the first Gulf War, I found myself feeling the same way. Walking through Knightsbridge in London, I kept my Army-issue gas mask strapped to my side—the 41st Combat Support Hospital's Colonel Bob Abodeely had given it to me as protection from the chemical weapons Saddam Hussein was suspected of using Even as I shopped for a gift for my wife in Harrods, it was with me.

Few who saw me understood why, and I got quite a few odd looks as I occasionally patted the gas mask at my hip as if it were Linus's security blanket. Security guards working at the store asked me about the mask. One had me unpack it. Another, who had just returned from Saudi Arabia, knew what it was and smiled. We shared the experience of seeing the skies overhead turn dark as midnight at high noon from the hundreds of oil fires blazing across Kuwait. We shared disconcerting memories of seeing blackened, scorched human flesh juxtaposed against bleached-white bones in burned-out Iraqi troop carriers, of dismembered body parts strewn across roads in and around Kuwait City.

"You can't understand if you haven't been there," the combat veteran told me.

I understand.

Last Friday afternoon the president ushered the press pool into the Cabinet Room and offered an unsolicited and unprompted assessment of NBC News. p"NBC, fake news," he said. Turning to the situation in Portland, he said the courthouse there "is in very good shape." He praised the DHS officers who, in response to the protests, were sent to the city to protect federal property. Trump said they have been strictly a"defensive."

"They're not allowed to be offensive, unfortunately," Trump said. He appeared listless.

He makes dog-whistle calls to racists, science deniers, conspiracy theorists, the uninformed and those filled with arrogant hatred so often it is damn near impossible to keep up.

You can get dizzy shaking your head at Trump's lunacy. But a lack of energy seems to consume him, even as he continues to call the coronavirus "the China virus." He makes dog-whistle calls to racists, science deniers, conspiracy theorists, the uninformed and those filled with arrogant hatred so often it is damn near impossible to keep up Protesters, Trump claims, are the worst.

"The ones that were the problem were absolute anarchists, in many cases professionals," Trump said about Portland's protesters.

Of course Trump spent the weekend golfing. Saturday was his 264th day of golfing during his administration, according to pool reports. When he wasn't golfing in the heat, he was tweeting self-praise for his handling of the coronavirus pandemic that has left nearly 160,000 Americans dead.

He started his workweek on Monday bragging about an imaginary crowd cheering him in Florida and claimed he has a 96 percent approval rating among Republicans.

That same day, New York prosecutors announced they are seeking Trump's tax re-

turns, citing reports of "protracted criminal conduct" at the Trump Organization, according to the Associated Press. This probably caused more presidential dyspepsia than his favorite McDonald's Happy Meal.

Trump is circling the drain, and that giant flushing sound comes from members of his own party pulling the chain. George Conway, one of the leaders of the Lincoln Project, penned a recent opinion piece for The Washington Post in which he said of Trump: "For the sake of our constitutional republic, he must lose, and lose badly. Yet that should be just a start: We should only honor former presidents who uphold and sustain our nation's enduring democratic values. There should be no schools, bridges or statues devoted to Trump. His name should live in infamy, and he should be remembered, if at all, for precisely what he was—not a president, but a blundering cheat."

As if to prove Conway's point, in an Axios interview with Jonathan Swan Trump dismissed late representative John Lewis because Lewis didn't attend Trump's inauguration.

In short, there are fools, there are damn fools, and there is Donald J. Trump.

His lunacy is compounded by the idiots he's hired who take advantage of a befuddled conman in order to advance their own interests. They are now running the show. Trump appears tired, set on cruise control and wanting to be anywhere but in the White House.

Winston Churchill once said, "This is the lesson: never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never in nothing great or small, large or petty never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense."

Trump knows neither honor nor good sense, but still he never gives in. It's hard for a dog with a bone to let go of the bone.

How do you cover a president who defies rational thought, honor, good sense, science and appeals to racism and class warfare—especially when he can cover all that ground in just one comment about fair housing? a"We ended a rule that was a very horrible rule for people in suburbia, in the suburbs. And that rule has been a very unfair rule for a long time and it was going to be made a lot worse by Biden and Cory Booker," Trump said last Friday about replacing an Obama-era policy intended to combat discrimination with one granting far fewer protections. "It's a rule that, basically, you build low-income housing and you build other forms of housing also having to do with zoning and destroy people that have lived in communities in suburbia. For years they've lived there, and they want to destroy their lives, and destroy what they have, and it's been going on for a long time. I ended the rule so people living in the suburbs will no longer have that problem."

Swan, in his Axios interview with the president, pushed back on every point he could, questioning Trump on many of his ridiculous claims, lies and dog whistles.

As Democratic operative Adam Parkhomenko put it Tuesday in his newsletter, Today's Big Stuff: "You've just been pantsed in front of the whole world by an Aussie reporter who two years ago was publicly kissing Jeff Sessions's ass until his lips bled. Swan is the first reporter aside from Chris Wallace to not just take Trump's idiotic dishonest non-answers with a nod and instead ask real, challenging follow-ups. It's so embarrassing for Trump, or it would be if he had any human feelings. But it's especially embarrassing for the other journalists who have interviewed Trump."

I guess I know now why the president has never agreed to sit down with me. His press people keep telling me I'm "on the list," but it must be the "people who will never have a private interview with the president" list.

Trump, meanwhile, keeps on steadily declining. Originally scheduled for 5:30 p.m., his Tuesday briefing was pushed to 5·50 p.m. But it was after six p.m. when he finally walked out to face the depleted press corps, once again befouling the Brady Briefing Room with a seemingly unending string of lies laced with the lethargy of an aging septuagenarian who'd rather be golfing.

As he spoke, I got that feeling once again.

I cannot explain it. You cannot understand if you haven't been there.

It is an uneasy feeling that keeps you looking over your shoulder. It's the realization that soon you will have to report on fresh carnage and destruction, the likes of which you never thought you'd see from the White House. It's the realization that things have gone so far south, they may never return to normal.

As for me, I still have my gas mask. I found myself strapping it up the other day. It gave me a sense of safety I hadn't felt since I last wore it nearly 30 years ago.

Covering wars and covering Donald Trump are a lot alike.

But as you look at Donald Trump these days, you can't help but realize he's out of gas. His war is soon to be over.

Covering wars and covering Donald Trump are a lot alike.

Welcome to **FLLWR,** where a comedian offers five recs carefully selected to amuse and inspire you in these unusual times

FLLWR

Follow, Listen, Laugh, Watch, Read: Five Recs From Comedian Beth Stelling

WRITTEN BY
BETH STELLING

INTRODUCTION
JAMES RICKMAN

With a daunting array of specials, writing credits, TV and podcast appearances, and best "stand-up" accolades, Beth Stelling is more than qualified to make you rethink Uncle Kracker (see below). Girl Daddy, a special whose name projects the odious label "female comic" onto hypothetical motherhood, premieres August 20 on HBO Max.

Look, as much as I love watching videos of people falling down stairs, cats fighting their reflections in the mirror and a goose playing a drum with his feet, I had to choose something with a little more substance. And that substance is garlic powder. I first came across Eddie and his grandma, whom he occasionally calls Mom Mom, in a video he took at the kitchen table while she seasoned her eggs with garlic powder. Like a lot of garlic powder. Eddie: "Oh my god, Mom Mom. That's insane!" To which she replies: "You're insane. That's what keeps me alive!" I guess I love the sweetness in Eddie's voice when he talks to his grandma, and the volume at which he has to deliver it in order for her to hear. Mom Mom never fails to make me laugh with her confident snark, which can only be gained from living on this planet as long as she has.

Because I tend to choose a song and listen to it on repeat for days on end, that song usually colors a particular time in my life or attaches itself to a memory. Monica Martin's "Cruel" underscored the wintry days I spent in New York City late 2018 staying at the Standard Hotel in the West Village after I headlined Gotham Comedy Club. I got a room for myself overlooking the Hudson River that I thought would provide the perfect setting to write, but they were doing construction every day. Loud banging, drills, wrenches maybe? It felt like they were cutting my room out of the side of the building. One afternoon I started to take a bath to relax, and the tub filled with brown water. So I toweled off, turned Monica up in my headphones, took a topless selfie and wrote some jokes before walking to my sets at the Comedy Cellar. I can barely choose a "Cruel" lyric to share, because I love all of them, but I'll go with the opening line: "Angel on my shoulder till I lost it / I'm barely out the door and she's exhausted."

I wasn't introduced to stand-up until I was 18 years old, and after deciding I wanted to try to be one I avoided watching it altogether: I was terrified of stealing material or a persona. Now I'm in a place where I can watch stand-up, but it's harder to elicit laughter because I've seen too much and know the tricks. This special, taped in 1979, took me on a ride and made me laugh out loud. Pryor is everything I aim to be: silly, dark, real, subtle, animated, vulnerable. So while Pryor's name is probably not new to you, 41 years later the jokes are still relevant. I found that incredible and sad.

LAUGH

Richard Pryor: Live in Concert 1979

WATCH

Normal People

Seriously screw this show for making all other love stories complete trash, including the ones I've personally experienced. For starters Normal People is beautifully filmed in Ireland, Italy and Sweden. I've only been to one of those places and no one like Connell kissed me. The acting, direction and writing (based on Sally Rooney's novel) are so captivating that I'm hesitant to even try to describe them to you. Just know that if Normal People were written about the first time I fell in love, it would be filmed in southwest Ohio as one long shot of me talking on a landline in my closet after setting my AIM away message to an Uncle Kracker lyric. BDStelling: "Follow me / Everything is all right / I'll be the one to tuck you in at night / And if you want to leave I can guarantee / You won't find nobody else like me."

Does it count as reading if you listen to it? The new age-old question. This book was recommended to me by comedian Charla Lauriston when we were writing on season 3 of The Last O.G. It's a compilation of advice columns that Strayed wrote anonymously, mostly for the online literary magazine The Rumpus. So the cat's out of the bag that Sugar is Strayed, and her book offers superb life and love advice from someone you know has lived without bumpers. I liked the audiobook because it's narrated by Sugar herself, in a calming voice that tempers some of the heavier essays.

READ

***Tiny Beautiful Things: Advice on Love and Life from Dear Sugar* by Cheryl Strayed**

Man in His DOMAIN Chris Brickley

The NBA skills coach built a career out of helping athletes train. Get to know the man with the VIP gym, famous friends, a bevy of brand deals and one unexpected pandemic pivot

BY **SOWMYA KRISHNAMURTHY** PHOTOGRAPHED BY **GUY LOWNDES**

There's no place like home. If Chris Brickley clicked his heels three times, it would be in black-and-white Puma sneakers—size 12—and matching Gucci socks. No matter where he is, he wants to return here: his gym in the heart of Manhattan.

"This is my place," he says, affectionately kicking the gleaming hardwood. "This is my love."

The NBA trainer reigns over perhaps the most famous gym in the world. Dubbed the Arena, Brickley designed the basketball court to be his oasis. Before the pandemic hit, he spent up to 14 hours here on any given day. Carmelo Anthony, D'Angelo Russell and James Harden could be spotted running drills or in pickup games during the off-season. Rapper J. Cole works on his shot here. So does Meek Mill. Earlier this year, before coronavirus, Justin Bieber and Quavo challenged Drake to a friendly match at the Arena that overshadowed the All-Star Weekend Celebrity Game.

The space—nestled inside Summit, a luxury high-rise with a sweeping glass lobby, indoor waterfall and panoramic vistas—opened in February 2019. A grayscale New York City skyline wraps the gym walls, the neutral motif accented by the orange splash of basketball rims. It's a calm respite from the hustle of Midtown. "This is a therapeutic place," Brickley says.

The Arena is invite-only, but social media—especially during the NBA's lengthy lockdown—has amplified the gym to legendary status. Brickley shares vignettes on Instagram that often go viral, aggregated by sports and celebrity media. TMZ even camps outside sometimes, ostensibly looking for a scoop or sound bite. Hip-hop usually pipes out of the gym speakers, but this afternoon it's quiet and empty.

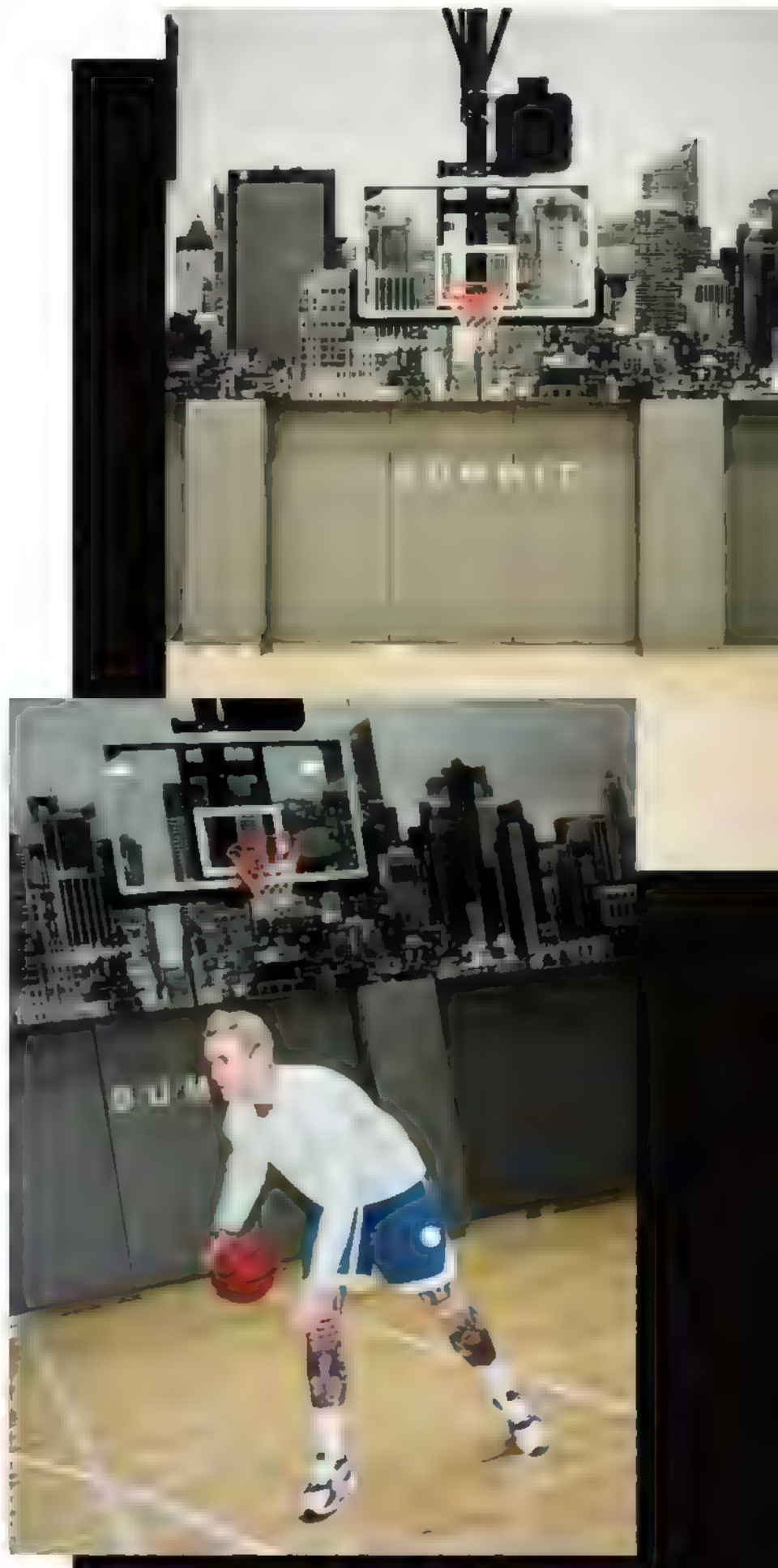
At 34, Chris Brickley is living a basketball fever dream. He was the first trainer to sign his own sneaker deal with Puma Hoops and the first trainer to be given a character in NBA2K20. "You keep working the way you did, the sky's the limit," his doppelgänger avatar says, in his voice. "Hit me up next time you want to work. I basically live in the gym." Last year, Brickley starred in and executive-produced the ESPN+ docuseries Declared, about prospects trying to level up to the pros, which landed him a spot on national TV as a commentator during the 2019 NBA draft. When I saw him in Chicago this February for All-Star Weekend, his itinerary was dizzying: hanging with the owners of the New York Knicks, Minnesota Timberwolves and Sacramento Kings; a basketball clinic at a community center; brunch with entrepreneur Gary Vaynerchuk.

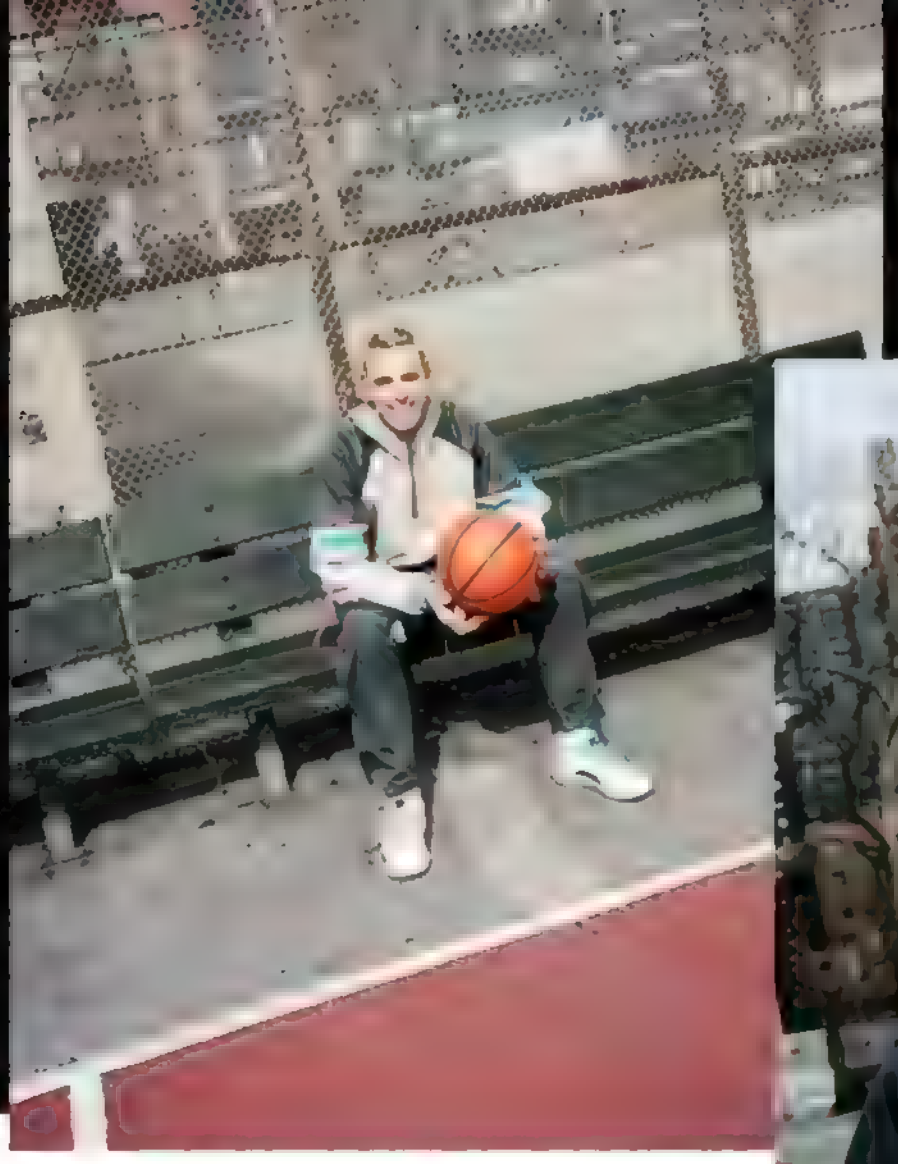
As his NBA2K20 character implies, Brickley really does live for work. He calls his gym his "girlfriend," and his two phones don't ever seem to stop buzzing. He has 1,200 unread texts and a deluge of direct messages.

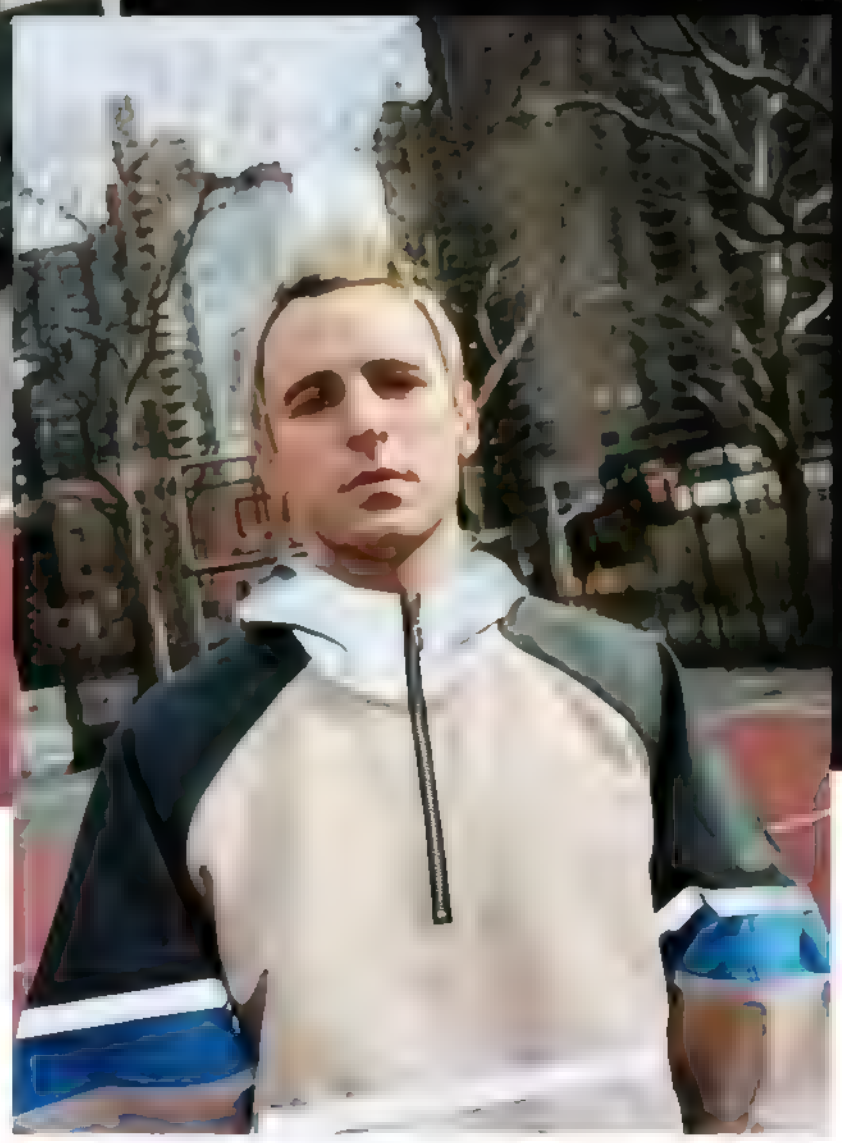
"I feel like every week, there's something new I could be doing," he says in a pleasant New Hampshire accent. Hold on just a second—an A-list rapper is blowing him up. Okay, he's back. He sleeps three, maybe four hours a night. Even during relaxed moments he's often scribbling in the notebooks that are his constant companion, documenting his ideas, plans, hopes. It's about pushing himself. "I need to keep doing things that are special," he says. "I need to keep signing deals that no one's ever done."

Chris Brickley grew up wanting to hoop. As a kid, his favorite team was the Boston Celtics; he'd pretend he was Peter "Pistol Pete" Maravich on the court. At Trinity High School in Manchester, New Hampshire, Brickley was twice named

"There's no medicine that makes me feel better. I guess if you really want to break it down, basketball has saved my life."







athlete of the year. At six-foot-four, he played a couple of seasons at the University of Louisville before pivoting into coaching. Things lined up. He became the youngest Division I assistant coach in the NCAA in 2011 and joined the New York Knicks in player development in 2013. A wunderkind, he impressed the likes of coaching legend Phil Jackson, but beneath the veneer of success Brickley was struggling.

"Every year, I was living check to check," he says. As he nurtured relationships with high-profile pros like Carmelo Anthony and J.R. Smith, he was also coping with low moments—eviction notices and bank overdrafts were a regular part of Brickley's life. But by 2016 he was confident enough in his growing Rolodex to venture out on his own. Leaving a steady gig with the Knicks—what many would see as a dream job—seemed beyond risky to some.

"My family was mad. My friends didn't understand. I didn't have health insurance," he says. "But I just truly believed in myself, knew that this was going to work out for me."

Brickley's gamble paid off. Today not only are his training talents in high demand, but his name as well: in April, he partnered with Chipotle for a namesake burrito bowl and in August, he announced a deal with streetwear reseller StockX. With nearly 1 million Instagram followers, he's become a bona fide influencer. Before the pandemic hit and sent everyone inside, it was hard to walk down the street with him—be it in SoHo, Harlem or Chicago—without somebody vying for his attention: Fans who want to dap him up, take a selfie or just smile and softly murmur, "Hey, Brick," in passing.

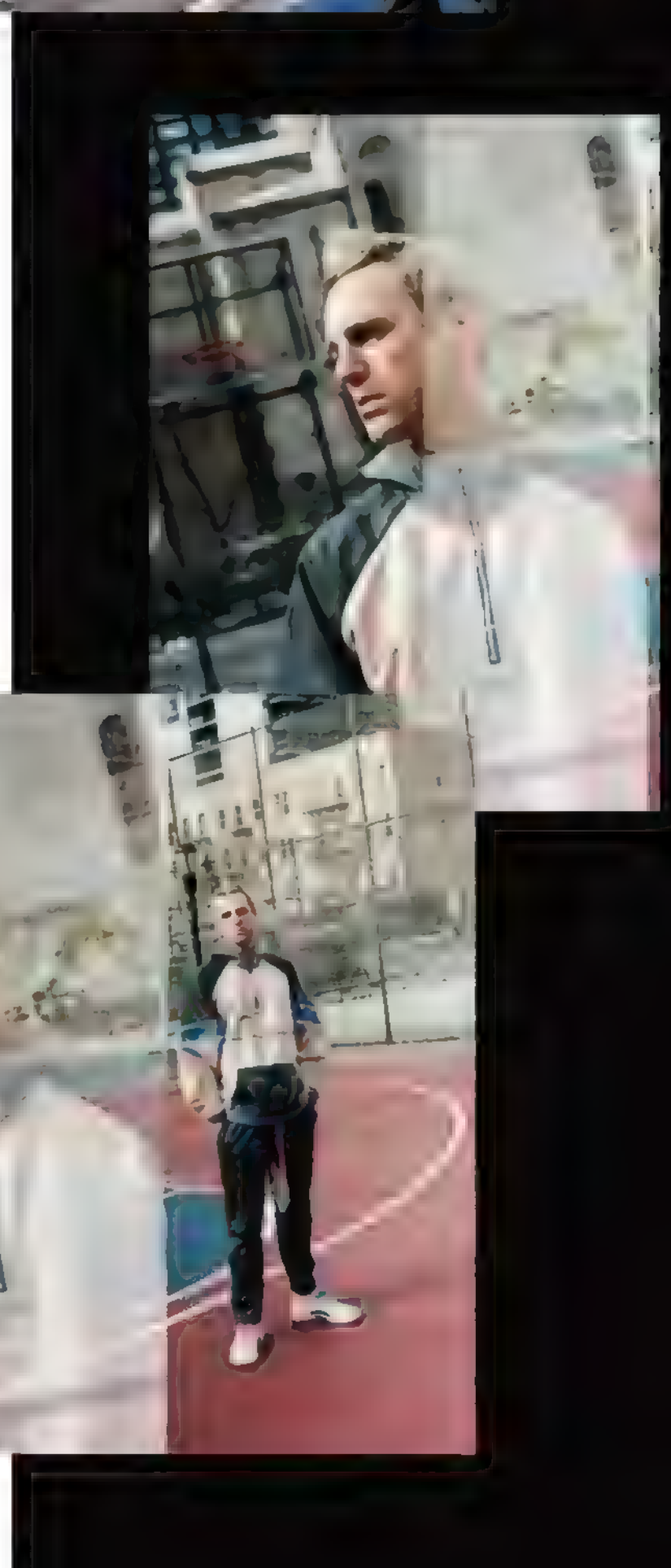
Building relationships—be it with brands, fans or basketball players—is the crux of Brickley's style. Tactical skills aside, when he's in training mode, it's imperative that he connect with his player: What motivates him? What makes him tick? Friendship and trust are key. "You can know all the basketball stuff in the world, but if you don't have a relationship with the players, they're not going to really listen to you," he tells me. Brickley also does his homework. As Kevin Porter Jr. of the Cleveland Cavaliers said on Declared, "He knows your game before you even step foot on the court. Before the first workout."

"Chris has created a sacred space," says Graham Betchart, a mental-skills coach who works with players like Aaron Gordon and Ben Simmons and has seen Brickley training. "It's a safe place for these athletes to come be themselves. And for most of them, they don't have many safe places." It's a judgment-free zone where men can let down their guard. Adrenaline pumping, it's not uncommon to talk about life, relationships, whatever. Says Brickley, "They can come in here and they can be vulnerable. And they know no one's judging them."

Brickley is candid about his own tribulations, including his difficult childhood with a mother who lived with mental illnesses and died by suicide in 1993. "She was sick. I know she loved me and she was just going through hard times." Several of his tattoos commemorate her. As an adult, he can empathize with what his mother must have gone through, and mental health awareness is a cause to which he is committed. Whenever he needs to untangle dark or complex feelings, he returns to his place of catharsis.

"There's no medicine that makes me feel better. It's the gym," he says. "I guess if you really want to break it down, basketball has saved my life."

The fact that Brickley is able to speak openly about his personal sorrows reflects something larger: Basketball stars are increasingly part of a paradigm shift in masculinity and mental health, going public about issues that previously would have remained private. Kevin Love of the Cleveland Cavaliers wrote a 2018 essay, "Everyone Is Going Through Something," about his panic attack;



it went viral. Love was inspired to open up in part thanks to DeMar DeRozan, then of the Toronto Raptors, who had come forward about his depression and anxiety. "It's one of them things that no matter how indestructible we look like we are, we're all human at the end of the day," DeRozan told the Toronto Star.

The loss of Lakers legend Kobe Bryant earlier this year shook the world of basketball. The league collectively grieved, with men in the spotlight expressing their pain and emotion. "Today is one of the saddest days in my lifetime," said Dwyane Wade on Instagram. Trae Young of the Atlanta Hawks broke down in his mother's arms before a game. Countless others shared their devastation on social media. For Brickley, it was poignant. "I see the players' vulnerable stages. It really touches me when you start seeing them do it publicly."

Normally, Chris Brickley lives for summer. When the NBA season is over, his gym comes alive—he anticipates it for months. But this year the coronavirus pandemic changed all that. In March, New York City shut down gyms, along with pretty much everything else, and the trainer's plans were put on hold.

"It hit me crazy because this is usually my time," he tells me via Zoom in July. "This is usually my busy time, doing 10 workouts a day, seven days a week. It's tough."

Brickley has been in the gym intermittently during lockdown, hammering out new drills and occasionally doing socially distanced workouts. College star Cole Anthony, who declared for the 2020 draft, was one of the few players who came in for a late-night session.

As the NBA tests its grand quarantine experiment at Disney World inside the so-called bubble, the new normal has been a challenge for Brickley, and not just in terms of his training dropping off. "When you're a social person and you thrive off of other people's energy, and you don't have that, you have to figure out other ways to get it."

So the trainer is funneling his energy into new creative endeavors, including a compilation of workout anthems called Welcome to the Grind. "Every time we work out, music is such a big thing," he says. Brickley envisions the album, which he describes as a hip-hop update of Jock Jams, as a way for fans to soundtrack their sessions like the pros and to reproduce a slice of the Arena's atmosphere inside their own homes. Executive-produced by Dave East and Lil Durk, Welcome to the Grind will feature tracks from artists that Brickley has forged friendships with through the years; Meek Mill, Travis Scott and Justin Bieber are likely contributors.

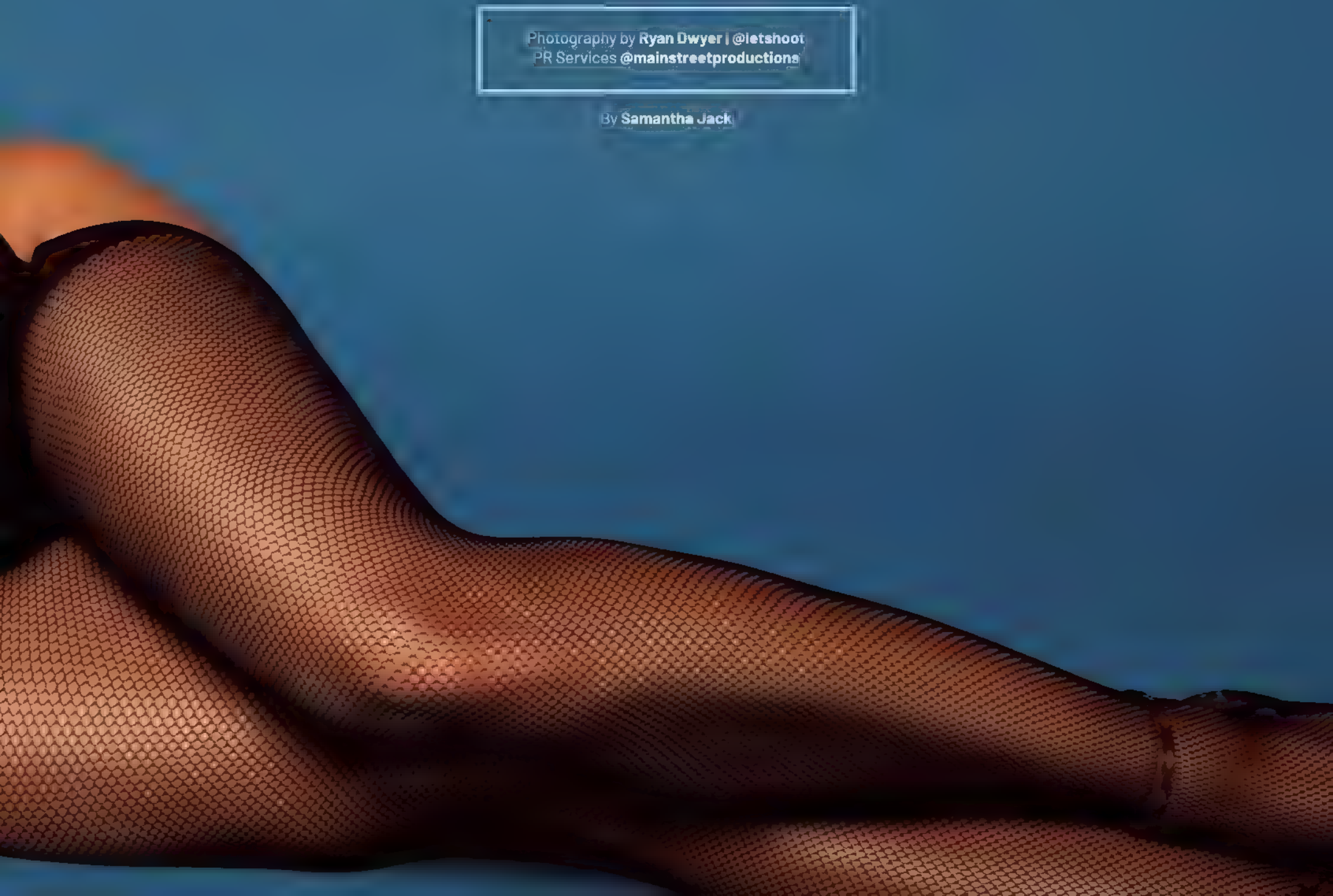
Brickley is targeting an early 2021 release for the project; hopefully, that time frame coincides with a return to some semblance of normalcy for the country. Until that point, everything is up in the air. Like the rest of us, he's just figuring out how to ride out the pandemic. But for now, you can find him at his gym.

FRANCESCA RICCI

Instagram @pretti.ricci

Photography by Ryan Dwyer | @letshoot
PR Services @mainstreetproductions

By Samantha Jack



Francesca It's such an honour to have a gorgeous and talented beauty on our cover! We're curious to know how your journey has been as one of the most respected models in your industry. My journey has made me the woman I am today. Coming from the smallest state in America, to living in the largest cities, I learned who I am, what I like & what I want. I'm just getting started at 25 years old. I can't wait to see what the future has in store!

Given your obvious stunning good looks and striking features, tell us a bit about where you're from? I have a European background. My Father was born in Italy and my mother is also from the Italian descent with a mix of swiss. Therefore I'm Italian and swiss which explains my expertise in cooking the best Italian meals & love for carbs! I stay looking like Barbie but in the kitchen I'm carbi! Haha (That's what the gyms for).

Tell us something surprising about you? Well I'm a pretty spontaneous person. I love adventure and experiencing different cultures. When I travel I usually get a one-way because I like to go with the flow of life. My goal is to travel to all the countries in the world one day.

2020 was an incredibly challenging for all us, what would say has been the most challenging thing for you thus far? The most challenging part of 2020 for me was not being able to travel. Though I love being a "home-body", I couldn't wait to go out, seek adventure, and meet new people.

What are some of the things you like to do, behind the cameras and all the glitz and glamour? Some things I like to do behind all the glitz and glamour is have relaxing days to myself either at home or at the spa where I can reflect on life's moments and think about how I can improve myself/the world.

If we were to try and sweep you right off your feet, what are some of the things you look for in an ideal partner? Some things I look for in an ideal partner are not just looks such as height and build, but someone who's heart and mind connect with mine on a deeper level. I would definitely need a man with a sense of humor, who loves to eat/travel, has a good sense of fashion, and would want to build a family.

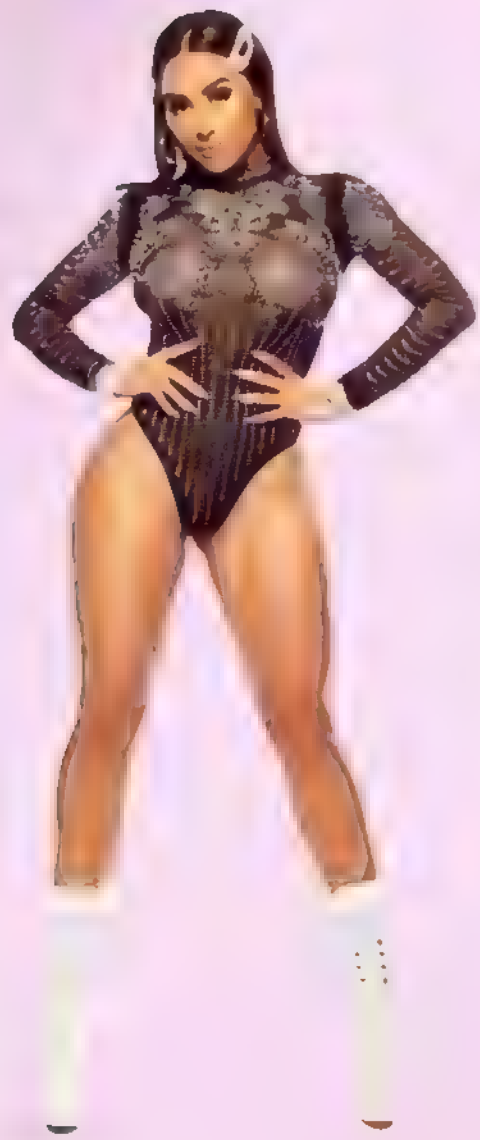
..And what would make you go running in the opposite direction as fast as possible?
What would make me go running as fast as possible is a man with bad hygiene and no life goals.

You're a seemingly talented lady, what are some, if any, of your hidden talents not many people know about? Some hidden talents of mine are my many dancing skills. Growing up I was a competitive dancer all the way through my first year of college. I practiced ballet, tap, jazz, modern, lyric, contemporary, and pointe! I still have my flexibility and I'll never lose my rhythm!

What makes you feel sexy? I feel sexy all the time! I have a sexual flirtatious personality and I love entertaining a group! I am funny and charismatic! When I'm with my friends having fun I almost always put on a dance show or start teaching someone a move and everyone loves it! I guess you would say, I think having confidence is sexy ;)

If you could have any superpower in the world, what would it be and why? If I could have any super power in the world I would want to be able to fly! I think flying would be so peaceful and pretty. I would also never have to wait in traffic again!

What can we expect from you this year? Any major plans and exciting things we can look forward to from you? This year you could expect me to open a hot & exciting new business! Stay tuned!



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SHINE

How to Vote in a Plague

With recent attempts from President Trump to undermi... mail-in voting, we have to be more vigilant than ever

ALEX THOMAS

MIKE SHINE

You imagine the postmaster general as a cartoonish figure with a top hat and a curling moustache. He looks similar to the Monopoly man but in a USPS-blue suit instead of a black one. In reality, the postmaster general is an uncreative man named Louis DeJoy, a millionaire Republican fundraiser with male-pattern baldness. He is the Trump ally in a post that was first occupied by Benjamin Franklin. Like the other Trump allies in government, he appears hell-bent on ensuring Trump carries the 2020 election.

DeJoy became the postmaster general in June, and seemingly, his goal has been to ensure that the post office is useless. He staged a power grab, reshuffling post office executives and banning overtime work, according to a memo reviewed by the Washington Post. The conductor was willfully clogging the gears. DeJoy's new policies bore macabre fruits: In Maine nearly 5,000 chicks arrived dead when delivered to farmers, according to Congresswoman Chellie Pingree. The Los Angeles Times described mail-sorting facilities in the city as having "containers of rotted fruit and meat."

The rotting meat and chick carcasses stinking up mail-processing centers are the smell of a voter suppression tactic unique to the coronavirus pandemic, during which millions of people will be voting by mail, hoping to keep themselves safe from the virus that has killed nearly 200,000 Americans. Long delays in mail delivery could muzzle the voice of the people. In Pennsylvania, the U.S. Postal Service has already warned that ballots may not be delivered on time.

Voter suppression is not a new tactic; as long as there have been elections in the United States, there have been political operatives trying to suppress the vote.

Members of Congress disagree on how best to handle the post office scandal; Republicans don't even consider it a scandal. They say the post office already has funding, noting the HEROES Act—the fifth legislative response to the coronavirus, which gave the post office access to a $10 billion line of credit. The HEROES Act passed the House on May 15 and has been sitting on Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's desk as negotiations between the parties and the White House have stalled.

The House of Representatives met for an emergency vote in the middle of their August recess to pass a stand-alone $25 billion post office funding bill. The messaging presented by Democrats was that their bill is a response to brazen voter suppression. During a break in the legislative action, New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez told Playboy, "I'm not going to sit here and pretend like our right to vote isn't under assault."

Asked how much faith Americans should have in their mail-in vote being counted through the standard procedures, Ocasio-Cortez said, "The confidence factor is not 100 percent right now, I will be very honest about that."

Voter suppression is not a new tactic; as long as there have been elections in the United States, there have been political operatives trying to suppress the vote. The first, and most important, step you need to take is to go to usa.gov (here) and confirm that you are registered to vote and verify your polling location.

Even if you're sure you're registered to vote—even if you remember registering—check your registration. Purges are a common voter suppression tactic. In 2018, Georgia Governor Brian Kemp cheated his way into the governor's mansion through a series of voter suppression tactics, including purging hundreds of thousands of voters from the rolls. Purge rates have increased in the past decade, according to the Brennan Center, and minority voters are more likely to be purged from the rolls.

Massachusetts Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley told Playboy that voters should go to the polls early if they live in an early voting state. But the extent of early voting differs by state and can be archaic; in California, early voting begins 29 days before the election. In North Carolina early voting begins on the third Thursday before election. To check the early voting laws in your state, visit the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The push to keep mail-in votes to a minimum traces to President Donald Trump, who has screeched constantly on Twitter that mail-in voting is rife with fraud. However, there's no evidence pointing to mass fraud in mail-in voting. The president has admitted that he is pushing back against Democrats' additional funding for the post office in an attempt to cripple the ability of the post office to allow people to vote by mail. In a recent Fox Business interview, Trump said, "Now [the Democrats] need that money in order to have the post office work, so it can take all of these millions and millions of ballots," adding moments later, "But if they don't get those two items, that means you can't have universal mail-in voting, because they're not equipped to have it."

If you are planning to vote by mail (or even if you aren't), you should immediately request a mail-in ballot. You'll have to do this through your state's website. In some states, mail-in ballots will automatically be sent to all registered voters. On March 4, California Governor Gavin Newsom issued Executive Order N-64-20, which ordered that a mail-in ballot be sent to all registered California voters.

Some states make it more difficult to vote by mail, and those challenges are especially prominent in Republican-controlled states. Texas allows four reasons to vote by mail: being "65 years or older; disabled; out of the county on Election Day and during the period for early voting by personal appearance; or confined in jail, but otherwise eligible."

Lawmakers Playboy spoke with repeatedly stressed that the best way to ensure your vote is counted in November is to make a plan to vote. "If you've not already requested a mail-in ballot, make sure you're making a plan to vote," Rep. Pressley said.

You should expect your mail-in ballot over a week before the election. In Washington state, ballots are mailed at least 18 days before the election. But with the mail slowed to a crawl—with the stench of dead chicks and rotting food in the mail-processing centers—there is a chance your ballot could take longer than usual to arrive.

Registering to vote by mail takes minutes. I timed my application and it took me two minutes and 54 seconds to request a mail-in ballot.

You're now over 1,000 words into this article. A study from Ghent University in Belgium says the average person reads about 238 words per minute, which means there's a good chance it took you longer to get to the end of this story than it would to request a mail-in ballot.

Some states make it more difficult to vote by mail, and those challenges are especially prominent in Republican-controlled states.

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